

Disrupting the Familiar

Education Project 1 EBA 858

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February 1997

University of Tasmania

*Disrupt Early Childhood
Primary Education*

This is submitted in partial fulfilment of a Master of Education Studies

Degree, Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania

Abstract

I have constructed a narrative that draws on a variety of traditions, disciplines and discourses. This narrative was located in the discursive territory made available to me by my reading of poststructuralist feminist theory. I adopted a conception of poststructuralist feminism as a transformational politics involving a struggle against domination and oppression, a struggle motivated by a desire to change ourselves as well as the structures in which we live, a struggle which results in the transformation of both ourselves and our world.

I have used the production of the text as an opportunity to reflect on the constructed nature of my own subjectivity. These reflections informed consideration of the construction of subjectivity in relation to five themes: one, feminism, patriarchy and power; two, ideology, discourse and language; three, truth, knowledge and reality; four, society, agency and subjectivity; five, dualism, consciousness and transformation. These themes were organised around the idea of betrayal and explored/expressed through three different kinds of text: autobiography; literary fiction; and academic theory. These were laid alongside each other and each intended to be an iteration of similar ideas expressed through the employment of different discursive styles.

The text was seen as an attempt at critical deconstruction, as a collision between the wider social structures and the life stories. Through this collision, the intention was to provoke the reader to critically reflect on the life stories presented in this work and perhaps, like the author, interrogate the deceptive habituated familiarity of her/his own life stories.

In searching for a non-dualistic formulation of the human subject I have attempted to locate a perspective that allowed conceptualisation of body, self, person, identity and subjectivity in terms of both structure and agency. Such a search involved an exploration of possible relationships between people, their historical, political and social circumstances and the choices that they make. In exploring possible relationships between people, history, circumstance and choice I acknowledged that social structures do not exist without human subjectivity, and that social structures define the boundaries within which human behaviour, feeling, thought and action are both made possible and given

meaning. I thus sought to articulate the inter-relationship of the human subject as agent and the social structure in which their subjectivity is enabled, enacted or performed in ways that proscribe, or enable, change.

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LOCUTION: a statement of intention

Beginning

This text is about many things and made of many parts. It is in some sense fragmented and in some sense connected. Both the fragmentation and the connection are intentional and I have struggled to articulate a dialectical relationship between them without imposing a linear logic or establishing fixed or final causal relationships. This text affects, or appropriates, three narrative styles; literary fiction, autobiography and academic theory. These are laid alongside each other and each is intended to be an iteration of similar ideas expressed through the employment of different discursive styles. In so doing I am exploring the ways in which narratives are differently produced, intentioned and situated, their meanings variously arrived at. Thus repetition across the various parts of this text is intentional. This repetition aims to foreground the ways in which similar ideas are differently produced through different discourses. It is also a stylistic device that simultaneously disrupts linearity and allows the writer to return to earlier ideas in order to elaborate their meanings.

This text is an exploration of myself, its author. It employs theory as a means of reflecting on the autobiographical stories, and situates the autobiographical stories as a ground for theory. In producing this text I am exploring the discursive production of my sexed/gendered/sexualised subjectivity, a subjectivity made flesh through the fictive narratives which allow its performance to appear, and feel, natural.

Betrayal

This text is, above all else, the product of my struggle to place myself in the world differently. It is an act of survival, motivated by a wound, by an act of betrayal. The sensation of the experience that is here (re)told is that of pain. It is precisely because of that pain that this text exists, has been made possible. This text is inscribed, scribed, described, in, by and through that pain.

Indeed, it is my contention that we have all been wounded, all betrayed. I am thus attempting to explore the relationship between the personal and the social, to explore the ways in which social structures, institutions and practices construct a range of subject positions that are taken up as if one's own. This illusion of individuality, this sense that our experience is our own, masks the discursive limits within which that identity is inscribed by socially produced discourses and relations of power. It is my contention that as social subjects we are betrayed in, through and by the truths, realities, knowledges, languages, selves and others that proscribe the subject positions available to us and through which we are able to take up, consciously or otherwise, a position that is experienced as personal, individual and natural. I understand that we are betrayed by the ideologies and discourses which make these betrayals possible, invisible and treacherous. Betrayal, then, is a central theme around which the various subjects and fragments of this text coalesce.

In attempting to unmask these betrayals I seek to disrupt the distinctions between the known and the not known; between the familiar and the strange; between fact and fiction; between the habitual and the possible.

Subjectivity

For Pile and Thrift the human subject cannot be counted as singular, but is rather understood as a 'mass of different and sometimes conflicting subject positions' (1995, p.1). These subject positions are historically and culturally variable and mobile, and having fluid and imprecise boundaries are difficult to define or contain. In exploring human subjectivity I do not seek to articulate a definitive, static conception of the subject. Rather, I attempt to negotiate a whole series of interconnected terms; body, self, identity, person and subject, and in so doing note that these terms are variously equivocal, ambiguous, evasive and contested. Further, it is anticipated that these terms will be subsumed within the embodied subject articulated by this text.

Discussion of bodies, selves and identities has often been formulated in binary terms; body/soul, reason/nature, nature/nurture, structure/agency. The structure/agency dualism emphasises social rules, sanctions and prohibitions on one side and individual thought, feeling and action on the other (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.2). The structure/agency dualism proposes, on

one side, that the choices people make are largely determined by the circumstances in which they find themselves. This implies a passive acceptance of the dominant ideologies and practices of the social structure, capitalism, patriarchy, socialism, communism, religious fundamentalism and so on. The structure/agency dualism proposes, on the other side, that people, though bound by certain constraints, largely determine their own circumstances. Yet, the extent to which people are free to choose what they do, without constraint on their actions, is uncertain.

In searching for a non-dualistic formulation of the human subject I am attempting to locate a perspective that allows conceptualisation of body, self, person, identity and subjectivity in terms of both structure and agency. Like Pile and Thrift, I attempt to locate

the possibility of a theory of social action which recognises both the determination of structure on the action of individuals and the determination of individuals to do things, sometimes differently.
(1995, p.2)

Such a search involves an exploration of possible relationships between people, their historical, political and social circumstances and the choices that they make. In exploring possible relationships between people, history, circumstance and choice I acknowledge that social structures do not exist without human subjectivity, and that social structures define the boundaries within which human behaviour, feeling, thought and action are both made possible and given meaning. I thus seek to articulate the inter-relationship of the human subject as agent and the social structure in which their subjectivity is enabled and enacted or performed. For Thrift,

human agency must be seen for what it is, a continuous flow of conduct through time and space constantly interpellating social structure.
(1983, p.31)

The acts, thoughts and feelings of an individual are thus located in time and space, in historical/political/social moments that produce, prioritise and privilege certain possibilities, certain choices, over others. It is thus possible to locate subjectivities, which incorporate bodies and selves, in relation to social institutions, structures and practices and the meanings they give to the lived experience of individual subjects and the relationship

between the meanings individuals ascribe to their lives and the choices they subsequently make.

Attempts to locate theoretical territories beyond the structure/agency dualism have focussed on the role of language in the production of culturally intelligible meanings about a range of phenomena, including human subjectivity (Cameron, 1985; Davies, 1989, 1993, 1994; Pile & Thrift, 1995; Spender, 1980; Weedon, 1987). These sets of linguistic practices are informed, and cohere around, structural constraints or ideologies and are manifest through discourses and discursive practices which define those practices, possibilities and choices that are culturally intelligible and permissible and those that are not. This turn to language has allowed an interrogation of everyday life 'as simultaneously real, imaginary and symbolic' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.4).

Text

This text aims, amongst other things, to consider the subject, and the lived experience of the subject, as constructed in this territory between the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. It aims also to interrogate commonly held, commonsense assumptions about the body, the self, the person, the identity and the individuality of the subject. This interrogation, this text, begins with the author.

I have attempted to construct autobiographical narratives from memories, many of them derived from early childhood. In accepting that these memories are more half-remembered possibilities than factualities I confer upon them the status of fiction. They are fictive narratives brought into play through the discourses through which they, and their meanings are articulated.

These fictive narratives are 'an enigmatic point of inactuality, a strange stasis, the stasis of an arrest' (Barthes, 1993, p.9). This arrest is a disruption of reality; a reality disrupted by the experience of pain; a painful disruption of the familiar; a fragmentation; a shattering of the self as previously known and understood; a shattering of the reality previously taken for granted. This text, like memory, has been worked and reworked and recognises that,

There is no pristine, pre-social nugget of memory that is just waiting to be uncovered and appreciated, that hasn't been worked over, again and again. What we are left with is a fictional reconstruction of life events that we lend significance to, in accordance with the way our present emotional investments in certain identities shift and change.

(Jackson, 1990, p.73)

This text is seen as an attempt at critical deconstruction, as a collision between the wider social structures and the life stories. Through this collision, the intention is to provoke the reader to critically reflect on the life stories presented in this work and perhaps, like the author, interrogate the deceptive habituated familiarity of her/his own life stories (Jackson, 1990, p.10).

I attempt, in the fictive autobiographical narratives to identify where agency, as expressed through choice making, might mediate structure, or where structure might mediate agency. Some of these choices were at times clear to me and consciously made. Other choices were more obscure, beyond awareness, outside conscious thought/action. For this reason, and others which will become clear throughout the text, reflexive consciousness is central to my project.

In interrogating identities I thus aim to construct them reflexively rather than simply recognise them, to acknowledge that they are made not given. In so doing I seek to articulate

the possibilities of hybrid identities which are not essentialist but which can still empower people and communities by producing in them new capacities for action.

(Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.10)

The resultant text, in terms of both style and subject matter, has been greatly influenced by poststructuralist feminist theory and represents my attempt to articulate the profound experience of personal transformation that has been central to its production. Through the use of multiple narratives I have attempted to record what it is like to undergo transformation in terms of both self understanding and an understanding of the situation of this self within its historical, political and social contexts. I am compelled to write in order to make sense of my self, my life, and therefore my explanation of subjectivity does not attempt to identify absolute, pure or universal structures which exist in any a-historical, a-political or a-social realm of possibility. Rather I think, reflect, speculate and write as an embodied subject with a particular historical/political/social location. In exploring patriarchy, power,

reality, consciousness and what counts as knowledge, I consider some of the structural features of the altered way in which I have come to look at self and world as both product and content of an altered consciousness.

This text, as a consciously constructed collection of fragments, contests the myth that there exists a unified, stable individual whose identity can be expressed in a single, authentic, internally coherent language. Rather, multiple voices are used to explore and articulate the conflicts and contradictions, the shifting perceptions and meanings, of both personal and social worlds. The text affects a variety of language styles and interactive, intertextual contexts to suggest a subjectivity similarly 'precarious, contradictory, and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak' (Weedon, 1991, p.33).

This text is neither a singularly focussed monograph nor a collection of disparate fragments. It has no single point or ambition. Rather, it is about the creation of 'shifting frameworks and models of understanding, about the opening up of thought to what is new, different and hitherto unthought' (Grosz, 1994, p.xiii).

This process does not pretend to be arbitrary, neutral or value-free. Rather, it is a deliberate, if selective, reworking of a personal history made possible within particular discursive contexts. The knowledge I seek is not value free, does not exist beyond the contexts in which it is constructed, and admits multiple possible meanings. Further, these meanings themselves are neither value free, nor located beyond the contexts in which they are constructed. My struggle is against the boundaries within which subjectivity, knowledge and reality are inscribed and constructed.

Theory

The theoretical positions I explore and adopt are not assumed to be monolithic, or capable of authentic replication. Rather, I recognise that within each theory there exist multiple discourses, some of them compatible, some competing, some contradictory, some contesting each other. Like Lather, in

Foregrounding the reductiveness of the interpretive act, I propose my readings across these complex, shifting and polyvalent fields as neither correct nor final.

(1990, p.126)

I adopt a conception of poststructuralist feminism as a transformational politics involving a struggle against domination and oppression, a struggle motivated by a desire to change ourselves as well as the structures in which we live, a struggle which results in the transformation of both ourselves and our world. Poststructuralist feminism is here understood as a politics directed at changing existing structures and relations of power, especially existing power relations between women and men in society. Further, I adopt a general notion of feminism as a politics that seeks to identify, critique and eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices individuals suffer because of their sex, their gender, or their sexuality (Weedon, 1991).

In reflecting on the relationship between the personal and the theoretical, the individual and the social, feminist theory provides a context for an interrogation of personal experience within a social context. Rather than being dismissed as subjective, biased, particular or exceptional, personal experience is understood as a means of 'opening up ways of locating ourselves within a shared experience of power and subordination' (Seidler, 1989, p.ix). Given this challenge to the social/personal, theory/experience, objective/subjective dualisms, feminist theory 'openly states that knowledge is necessarily limited, representing only some possibilities' (Grosz, 1988, p.51). Such a view acknowledges a perspectival, partial and invested position in the production of knowledges. In place of an absolute and universal patriarchal knowledge, feminist theory proposes knowledges that are limited, political and representative of some, but not all, interests. Thus, there emerge multiple feminisms, multiple theories and multiple knowledges, some of which may contradict or openly contest each other, some of which may, or may not, be represented in this text.

Having come to observe, understand and experience myself as fragmented, changeable, illusory, contradictory and unstable, I seek to articulate this self, write and speak this self, through disclosures that do not suppose or impose a sense of authenticity, certainty and essential foundation where none is perceived to exist. Thus in conceiving of structures without fixed centres it becomes possible to perceive them as 'always open to interpretation without end, unconfined, unreduced, unfinalised, untotaled, not continuous, not linear, where truth is never arrived at, is always involved in a play of differences that keep deferring its arrival, its full presence' (Docker, 1994, p.133). Such deferral makes space within discourse, within self, within text, for complexity, contradiction, density, difficulty and mystery.

This space is created in the simple admission that not everything, least of all this self, can be explained. What I seek, in entering this space, are ways of understanding self, sex, gender, sexuality, knowledge, reality, truth, social relations and culture, that do not resort to linear, hierarchical, singular, or binary ways of thinking and being. What I seek is a position of critical distance from those taken-for-granted assumptions accorded the status of truth within culture. This critical distance creates a space in which critique and reconstruction of existing social structures and practices becomes possible.

Purposes

This text aims to contest the myth that there exists a unified identity, self, authentic core or essence at the heart of the individual, 'a kernel of I-ness just waiting to be uncovered' (Jackson, 1990, p.6). Thus my self-reflexive narratives do not suppose that it is possible to 'strip away the onion-skin layers of deception' (Jackson, 1990, p.6) so that the authentic self may be revealed. Rather, I proceed on the understanding that this text is produced by, and reproduces for the reader, 'fragmentary I's that are constantly shifting over time and in different contexts and interactions' (Jackson, 1990, p.6). These fragmentary I's constitute multiple identities which are formed within different discursive frameworks. These fragmentary I's and multiple identities contest essentialist views of the self and understand the construction of subjectivity to be contradictory and open to change.

But fragmentariness can also dissolve into isolated, individual acts rather than build up collective strength. Perhaps we need a more dialectical view that tries to bring together an awareness of multiple identities with a recognition that some versions of the self seem to be more significant than others. Perhaps they seem more important because they offer a greater continuity and coherence to us at times of flux. This can mean inviting us to embrace the illusory safety of a temporary 'real me', while, at the same time, being in the midst of other transitional selves that are continuously coming into conflict with the 'real me'?

(Jackson, 1990, pp.6-7)

I have used the production of this text as an opportunity to reflect on the constructed nature of my own subjectivity. These reflections inform consideration of the construction of subjectivity in relation to five themes, each of which provide a focus for the chapters which follow. These themes

are: one, feminism, patriarchy and power; two, ideology, discourse and language; three, truth, knowledge and reality; four, society, agency and subjectivity; five, dualism, consciousness and transformation. These themes are organised around the idea of betrayal and explored/expressed through three different kinds of text: autobiography; literary fiction; and academic theory. The autobiography is distinguished by the use of italics, the literary fiction is distinguished by the use of bolded text and the reflections on both these and the academic theory are distinguished by the use of normal text. In what follows I juxtapose these three narratives in an attempt to further explore the complexity of the subjects and themes announced in this statement of intention.

LOCATION: a statement of position

What follows are story fragments, representing each of the fictions, autobiographical, literary and academic, to be found in this text. Selections from Jeanette Winterson's text, *Sexing the Cherry* (1990) are referred to as 'Her Story'. The autobiographical fictions are referred to as 'My Story'. Reflections on the academic texts and theories of others are referred to as 'Our Story'. The juxtaposition of these fictions is intended to signal, echo or illuminate the themes, reflections and preoccupations explored throughout this text.

My purposes in this are multiple, differently intentioned at different moments; firstly to both reveal and conceal myself, my thoughts, to wedge them between someone else's narratives; secondly to demonstrate intertextuality; thirdly to signal many of the preoccupations that appear throughout my text; and fourthly, to interrogate everyday life as simultaneously real, imaginary and symbolic.

The following extract from *Sexing the Cherry* (1990) has been selected and positioned here to draw attention to the way in which those unremembered and hence invisible episodes from childhood gradually appeared before me and, in revealing themselves, disrupted the familiar life with which I had become habituated.

HER STORY

Every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are the journeys I wish to record. Not the ones made, but the ones I might have made, or perhaps did make in some other place or time.

For the Greeks, the hidden life demanded invisible ink. They wrote an ordinary letter and in between the lines set out another letter, written in milk. The document looked innocent until one who knew better sprinkled coal dust over it. What the letter had been no longer mattered, what mattered was the life flaring up undetected ... till now.

I discovered my own life was written invisibly, was squashed between the facts, was flying without me like the Twelve Dancing Princesses who shot from their window every night and returned home every morning with torn dresses and worn-out slippers and remembered nothing.

I resolved to set a watch on myself like a jealous father trying to catch myself disappearing through a door just noticed in the wall ... I was giving myself the slip and walking through this world like a shadow. The longer I eluded myself the more obsessed I became with the thought of discovery. Occasionally, in company, someone would snap their fingers in front of my face and ask, "Where are you?" For a long time I had no idea, but gradually I began to find evidence of the other life and gradually it appeared before me ...

Winterson, 1990, pp.9-10

This fragment of Winterson's text conveys a sense of the multiple, simultaneous journeys that I have undertaken and of the unexpected eruption of that which was previously invisible. My text recounts many journeys, some consciously begun, some not. Each point of departure, each turn, each moment of arrival has revealed paths previously invisible, some taken, some not.

What follows is an attempt to rearticulate, elaborate and demonstrate some of the preoccupations and ideas signalled in my earlier statement of intention. These multivoiced textual fragments have been dated and arranged in a way that attempts to foreground the constructed nature of the text and demonstrate that it is neither seamless nor homogenous. Rather it has been conceived piecemeal over time and fashioned into a text by way of connecting themes and ideas. In so doing I attempt also to cut, perforate and juxtapose polyvocal narratives which work alongside each other, creating a text in which it becomes possible to read between the lines set out in another story, to discover the invisibly written life squashed between the facts.

I attempt here also to signal the ways in which a specific incident, an experience of sexual abuse at the age of seven, has impacted on the production of this text. This incident has been understood, interpreted and reworked as a betrayal of trust at the hand of the father and has emerged as critical to the conceptualisation of betrayal as the central idea around which the themes and reflections of this text coalesce.

Betrayal is here understood as involving something totally unexpected; something unforeseen; the involuntary or treacherous revelation of something previously hidden; a disruption which re/locates the subject differently in relation to a previous state of acceptance, comfort, safety or trust. Betrayal then, marks the end of a state of primal, unconscious trust. This state of trust is critical to the acceptance and maintenance of particular beliefs, understandings and practices to which we have become habituated. The disruption or loss of this trust marks a crisis; a dissatisfaction; a refutation or refusal of the familiar; and is in this sense critical to my understanding of my own experience and of the possibility of both personal and social transformation.

The theme of betrayal is, in this work, expressed in the belief that things are always much more than they seem. Trust and betrayal are understood to be concomitant. The more intimately, thoroughly and invisibly we are embedded in something, the greater the drama of betrayal. Acts or experiences of betrayal mark the cessation of, or expulsion from, a state of

innocent trust, of unconscious, unquestioned acceptance. Separated from an object, situation or experience of familiar intimacy we are made vulnerable to the unknown, the unfamiliar. Betrayal then, is a wounding, a painful disruption of the familiar which allows for the gaining of complexity, the gaining of another view from which new possibilities may emerge. What interests me then, about betrayal, is not the eruption of fear, doubt, paranoia or cynicism, but the disruption of the familiar and the possibility of insight and transformation that this disruption brings. Betrayal brings too, the challenge of reflection, of an altered way of seeing and knowing, of an altered consciousness. This alteration, in turn, brings the possibility of resistance, subversion, transgression and transformation.

Betrayal is also understood to be about relations of power and the ideologies, discourses and discursive practices which simultaneously structure them and render them invisible. Betrayal is also understood and explored at the literal/personal level at the hand of my father and at the symbolic/structural/political level at the hand of patriarchy and patriarchal ideologies. Betrayal is thus understood as simultaneously personal and political, individual and social.

A certain pleasure is derived from a way of imagining oneself as individual, of inventing a final rarest fiction: the fictive identity. This fiction is no longer the illusion of a unity: On the contrary, it is the theatre of society in which we stage our plural; our pleasure is individual - but not personal.

(Barthes, 1994, p.62)

My stories, like myself, are discursive constructions. These constructed stories are not so much chronicles of actual experiences, but reconstructed memories that resemble the original experiences perhaps only in certain ways. Further, these memories are reconstructed and retold at some significant distance from the original experiences, and as such are reproduced or produced in a narrative more impressionistic, even fictionalised, than a simple and certain recount of events might allow. As author of these autobiographical stories I am engaged in the creation of myself, my world, my reality.

Through this process, personal history becomes philosophy, and though built on fact, memory becomes fantasy, important fantasy, and ultimately the mythology by which we make our choices and live our lives.

(Moore, 1994, p.36)

MY STORY

Instead of following the path of a formal ontology (of a logic), I stopped, keeping with me, like a treasure, my desire or my grief ... not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think.

(Barthes, 1993, p.21)

JANUARY 1996

I balk, demur, desist. This act of writing, this written, this writer, is tense, apprehensive, resistant, unsure of where to begin. I want to start everywhere, on all sides, but must locate a moment from which to sketch my narrative. I want also to acknowledge both the constructed nature of this narrative as well as the conditions under which it has been constructed. This text has been made, planned, revised and is not a seamless fabric of recollections and reflections.

AUGUST 1995

I have attempted to fashion connections across a number of ideas, discourses and disciplines. A singular purpose - an historical, political and social reflection on patriarchy - gave way to multiple and more complex purposes, manifest in a preoccupation with perceived relationships between: the social construction of subjectivity and human agency; the discursive limits of language and the construction of subjectivity and reality; hierarchical oppositional binarisms and the allocation of privilege, authority and power; and pedagogical theory and practice and the construction of knowledge and truth.

Reflection on these relationships gave way to an elaboration of multiple, and more complex, interrelationships. Further, what began as a narrowly focussed academic text gave way to something more personal. This shift profoundly altered the style, content and structure of the text, and necessitated the construction of multiple, and more complex, texts.

My purposes, my texts, attempt to disrupt the taken for granted fact/fiction, rational/emotional, body/mind, self/other, male/female binarisms that freeze the field of possibility into a series of either/or choices.

I look to poststructuralist feminist theory and the possibilities of emancipatory/liberatory pedagogy for the reinvention/reconstruction of both subjectivity and reality, of both the subject and the real.

FEBRUARY 1996

I have attempted to create a polyvocal text which articulates narratives of possibility which disrupt dominant, taken-for-granted stories of a natural, inevitable and immutable gender order/reality. These stories/narratives are acknowledged as subject to truth/knowledge regimes, but not always subjected to them. They are, rather, juxtaposed against them to acknowledge their provisional status.

Finally I am motivated by the possibility that people can transcend their difficulties, their sadness and their pain. And that is where my narrative begins. With pain.

OCTOBER 1995

I am outraged that this thing from the past sits like a rock in my belly. Though wishing it gone, I hold it. Cling. Grip. My body tensed in its protection. It is a weight; a stone rolled across the entrance of a dark cavernous moment. That moment has passed, is past, but alive in me still. A dead weight. Immovable. Painful. Immobilising. I lie here, immobilised, vacillating between frustration, anger and exhaustion. I don't need to hold this moment, this souvenir. I cannot deny its presence nor expect its memory to evaporate. Vanish. Rather, I can acknowledge this hard and bitter stone and release it from the place in which it has become lodged. Ease out. Move. Discard. Expel. This is possible, yet may cause as much pain in the passing as in the holding. It is Father; it is Brother; it is Lover. This patriarchal trinity have struck and played my weakness, making sad music.

I offer up my stone, my sadness, my weakness, my bitterness. I seek release from the part of me that inhibits the free play of possibility in my life. I claim, reclaim, the freedoms that have been taken from me, that I have surrendered. This freedom is simultaneously exciting and terrifying. Liberation plays against the fear of disintegration.

FEBRUARY 1996

The progress of this dissertation was disrupted by an eruption of my personal/emotional/psychological life, and I wanted to incorporate these eruptions into my text. It seemed to me then, as now, that the ideas I had been exploring in my reading and writing had unsettled me in a way I had neither anticipated nor fully understood. My academic work engaged me in critical reflection on issues and questions that I came to see as inextricably bound up in events that had shaped me since childhood. In recording these events, or some of them at least, I became persuaded by the proposition that reality is as much plastic as it is concrete.

There is no such thing as objective reality. We each select our experiences through the filters of our genes, values and belief systems. Beginning with the world of our parents and then that of our surrounding society and institutions, we learn to see the world in a limited way that influences what we remember or forget, emphasise or downplay.

(Suzuki, 1987, Preface)

This text is similarly constructed, though more intentional. It is motivated by a desire to make connections between my academic research and my experience. Here, theory juxtaposes experience. Here, theory is better understood through reflection on experience and experience better understood through reflection on theory. In so doing I have constructed, reconstructed and retold stories about myself, stories informed by experiences, events and memories which feel important to me and which may provide insight into some of the ideas and opinions I now hold, as well as those ideas with which I currently struggle. In recounting these stories I struggle with chronology. My stories, unlike familiar linear narratives, do not begin at the beginning and end at the end. Memory-like, they do not conform to any ordered chronological sequence. Rather, they are erratic and, like this text, move backwards and forwards in time, subject to the vagaries of memory and the purposes of their author.

When Ettie tells this story, although I have no reason not to believe it is true, it's sometimes hard to distinguish from the fairy tales she uses to illustrate her life. When I imagine the world in which she lived as a girl all that time ago, I do so through the lens of history. But Ettie does not see the past through a plate-glass window separating then from now. She sees the past more as a dream, and in that dream all of us are linked. For there are passages that everyone of us must traverse on our entry into life. It is the journey of the soul that marks us, Ettie says. Or not. And for that journey the past has as much meaning as the

present, and legend is as potent as the truest stories ... My friend Louise says it was Ettie who taught her that the past need not always be appeased; from her she learned to embrace it as a dream, allowing the narratives and rich images of memory into the clatter and uncertainty of the present.

(Modjeska, 1995, pp.4,7)

JANUARY 1992

Sleep is a problem; a confusing problem. I drift into sleep without trouble, but then I wake up. Sort of. Whilst I believe that my body is asleep my mind is somehow awake. Body asleep, mind awake. If this is not confusing enough I am confounded by the realisation that my mind is not awake to anything in particular- indeed anything at all. Except the sensation of being awake. Awake but not conscious. I don't think, dream, see or hear anything. Nothing. All I know is that my mind is not asleep in a sleeping body. At first this contradiction unsettles me, but as the month wears on I become surprisingly used to it. It becomes familiar, almost commonplace. Ordinary. Each morning I rise and my now awake body performs its daily rituals - exercise, eat, shower, dress. Yet I am an automaton, for my mind is still in its somewhere else place. I sense the space left empty by its absence. I learn not to panic, to wait the customary hour for mind to re-enter body, to reunite. I live like this now. Quietly. I do not tell anyone. It is secret, a hidden thing.

FEBRUARY 1992

A friend is critically ill and I fly to be with her. I tell her of my altered sleep. She has temporarily lost her sight and I am her eyes, just as she is my ear. I guide her, distract her. I take her to visit her friend the chiropractor. He has a new surgery nearby, a surgery he shares with a psychotherapist. It is Saturday. The surgery is closed and this chiropractor is painting his consulting room. Just as we are about to leave the psychotherapist calls in to check the progress of the painting. We are introduced and my friend suggests that I speak to him about my sleep. He proposes a consultation there and then, and I agree.

hypnosis n (pl.-oses) (artificial production of) state like deep sleep in which the subject is responsive

So, here I am. Both asleep and awake. Again. Yet this time my mind is also conscious. Working. Listening. Thinking. Imaging. Responding to questions. I am wandering through my childhood. Unhappily. I find little comfort. I remember mostly fear, hurt, anxiety, insecurity. Remember? Perhaps it is more accurate to say that I experience the sensation of these things, for they are more feeling than facts of memory. More artefact than fact. I become increasingly panicked, fearful, rigid. I hear my quavering suppressed voice answer questions, eventually lapsing into silence. I am asked again to describe what is happening, who is there with me in this fractured moment that grips my mind. But I cannot say. I am mute. Not through ignorance, or doubt. But from terror. All I can say is that I am on the floor and that there is a shape over me. A big black shape like a blanket, at first standing, hovering, perpendicular, then suddenly over me. Terrified, unable to proceed, I am brought from this artificial sleep into waking consciousness. I rise from the couch/bed on which I have been lying and move to the armchair where I replace and retie my shoes. I am asked again, in this waking state, if I can reveal more about the black shape. I want to say 'It is my father'. But I resist. Suppress the urge and almost immediately forget that I had wanted to say it. Asked again, sometime later, the words spill out, and as given breath are given life. My life. I am not asleep, artificially or otherwise. I am awake, but everything is a dizzying black. I am in a wheeling vortex. I am not in this room. I am not an adult. I am in the loungeroom of my childhood home. I am a child. I do not see this as if looking back. I am there. This is now. I feel it. I know it. Yet I cannot see where I am or what is happening. Everything is black. But I feel it. I feel my father's strength, dominance, power. I feel him enter me. I feel the pain. I scream. I relive, reexperience a moment from long ago. It is happening now.

JANUARY 1966

I remember. It is morning, I am at home. I believe alone. I am in the loungeroom, singing something from 'The Sound of Music' in my tuneful boy soprano. I am absorbed, pleased with the sound of myself, lost in a reverie of song. The door opens and my father comes in. I am surprised (why isn't he at work?) and embarrassed (caught in a private moment). He's been sleeping off last night's drink (I recognise the signs). He wears only his underwear, white

Y-fronts and singlet. He tells me I sing like a girl. That's all I remember until 1967. I lose a year of my life. I lose a part of myself.

FEBRUARY 1992

My sense of myself, the self I thought I was and knew, has been shattered, fragmented. I am crushed by this revelation. Lost. I am frightened, exhausted and confused. My mind is crowded by questions which have no answers and answers which have no questions. Did this really happen? Why would I make it up? Is it true? How can I prove it? How can I have forgotten? Why have I remembered? What else have I forgotten, misremembered, believed to be true? What and where are the boundaries of consciousness? What is real? How can my body remind me of things my mind has forgotten? How can my body know things I don't? How can I assume to know anything?

I become obsessed with proof. Truth. I search for clues. I recall that January when I was seven. I hatch that memory to this experience. 'The Sound of Music'? Surely I was too young to have seen it, too young to remember the songs. I go to a bookshop and look for a guide to the movies. Skimming to 'S' I find what I am looking for. I discover that I could have seen the film, could have known the songs. But what does this prove? All too little I'm afraid. I oscillate between certainty and disbelief, and still do. How can I know? How can I be certain? How can I determine the truth? I can't.

FEBRUARY 1996

You cannot sit down to write about yourself without rhetorical questions of the most tedious kind demanding attention. Our old friend, the Truth, is first. The truth ... how much of it to tell, how little? It seems it is agreed this is the first problem of the self-chronicler and obloquy lies in wait either way. Telling the truth about yourself is one thing, if you can, but what about the other people.

(Lessing, 1995, p.11)

Herein lies my greatest anxiety. In determining the truth of this matter I am not happy to say simply, this is true, or this is true for me. For my truth profoundly implicates another. My accused. I don't have the stomach for accusations of such tenuous uncertainty. Indeed, at times I censor my text so

as not to implicate particular others. My difficulty in locating truth is thus compounded by the responsibility that such truth seeking brings.

There are, however, things of which I can be more certain, memories, though difficult to locate in time, which feel more reliable.

I remember the mixture of fear and deference that characterised my relationship with my father. I saw and knew him as wild, angry, violent, abusive, unpredictable and out of control. He was big, loud and without gentleness. I, by comparison, was small, fragile, uncertain, sickly, tentative. I disliked the way he treated my mother, who bore the brunt of his intemperate behaviour believing that in so doing she was protecting us, preserving our childhood. Early on I made a decision. A commitment. Whatever my father was, I was not. Whatever he did, I would do the opposite. I thus inscribed myself as weak, powerless, passive, quiet, sensitive, caring. I looked around and noted what people did, how they behaved. Seeing similarities between my father and his friends I quickly generalised his behaviour to include all men. I became less able to distinguish between those who were like my father and those who were not. For now I had generalised responses of fear, powerlessness, silence and mistrust to all men. This has dogged much of my adult life and is something with which I still occasionally struggle.

Since I had come to ascribe hegemony to all men I defined myself as not male in order to sustain a sense of difference, of otherness. Whilst I identified and felt comfortable with women I knew, as much as I believed I was not male, that I was not female. The only male identity I felt able to adopt was that of boy. Even in my twenties, with the young children I was teaching, I playfully, though seriously, denied that I was a man, insisting instead that I was a boy.

Denying my maleness/masculinity engendered a sense of difference. Always at school I was marked as such. Girlie. Sissy. Poof. I was secretly happy with this. To be thus marked confirmed my status as not male, as not inscribed by the things that masculinity implied, and which I so hated. So, disliking men (and not being one of them anyway) I eschewed their company. Yet, as an eleven year old, I became enthralled by men's bodies. Desiring, I eroticised male bodies whilst dismissing the men who inhabited them. After some years I learned that this attraction had a name, 'homosexual', yet had no concept of homosexuality, of the sexual as lived experience. That came later,

and once again I resisted categorisation. Having been neither interested in nor aroused by women's bodies, I believed that I was not heterosexual. Yet I could not identify with the men I knew to be homosexual. I therefore inscribed myself as not heterosexual/not homosexual, and resolved the impasse by remaining nonsexual for many years. All this time the contradiction of my simultaneous attraction to and dislike of men was a source of irony, though somehow not of confusion. It was a contradiction I could live with.

I have come to understand that the family I have grown up in was predicated on fear and power. I have come to understand that the world I have grown up in, was, and still is, predicated on the systemic and systematic allocation of power to men, and to some men more than others. I seek to understand this allocation of power, and propose a world predicated on love instead of fear, a mutual, reciprocal, sustaining love that empowers, emboldens and emancipates.

To this end I have sought a theoretical framework that enables me to engage in self reflexive speculation on the formation of my attitudes, beliefs and knowledges about myself and my world. In locating a framework I also require one that allows me uncertainty and contradiction, that allows me to make provisional, partial statements that express my meanings as fully as I am able without closing those meanings to further interrogation and revision. I desire a framework that encourages thinking liberated from binary logic, where I can simultaneously know and not know, understand and not understand, that constantly opens and expands my field of inquiry. What I seek is no closed, finite set of meanings but rather, a web of possibilities from which the choosing subject makes decisions and takes action, in so doing manifesting some possibilities and not others. Thus, reflections on feminism, poststructuralism, discourse theory and subjectivity inform my stories and my search for theory that may illuminate their possible meanings. It is anticipated that my search will lead me beyond the limits of the discourses currently available to me and into the realm of the as yet unsaid, the not yet conceived, the not yet possible. I desire, then, alternative discourses that are not predicated on binary logic and power, nor motivated by fear. I am here struggling to articulate a discourse of love, one that is praxis oriented and not disembodied or abstracted. This struggle begins, has begun, with my stories, with me.

NOVEMBER 1995

Quite early on I had discovered the overlooked space open to those of us with a silent life ... I had the trick of survival, of being able to hide in silent places.

(Ondaatje, 1992, pp.200-201)

I seek now to reveal, expose, release myself from that hidden place, break silence, find voice and tell what I have seen, heard and become during that time of hiding.

Now revealed, I begin again, disrupting my familiar, uncertain of who I am, where I am going or what I might find. Yet, being, going and finding anyway, always in search of those things 'beyond the horizons of all the narratives of our lives' (Okri, 1991, p.229).

OUR STORY

What follows is simultaneously a theoretical reflection on my stories, on myself as their author and on the means of their production. It is also a reflection on myself as the author of this text and on the terms of its production. I am thus attempting to locate myself at the centre of my many narratives.

Location

As much as I am located in a succession of historical, political and social moments I am located too in this text. As fictive autobiography and an exploration of a discursively produced subjectivity, there is a moment in which I am this text, and this text is me. We are both, my text and I, discursively produced.

A person is a text of sorts, as are his or her stories, theories, ideas, memories, wishes, intentions - anything that a person expresses. Like any rich text, a person has many, many layers of meaning, most of them unknown, even to himself.

(Moore, 1994, p.245)

Thus I am, and this is, a self/text, told and retold from different moments and from different perspectives.

Perspectives

My text is self consciously constructed from a position of white, middle class, non-hegemonic, non-heterosexual male masculinity (Connell, 1991). In contesting patriarchy I seek out a 'nonphallogentric patterning of reality' (Jaggar & Bordo, 1990, p.6) as well as those discourses that make such apprehension imaginable, capable of articulation and possible. In so doing, I preference those discourses that allow me, as subject and author, to conceptualise the knowing subject as embodied, interested, emotional and rational, and as having been constituted by particular historical, political and social contexts. Thus in locating myself in the text I seek to both

contextualise self and knowledge as historical, political and social and foreground the ways in which my thoughts, values and acts take their meanings from the contexts in which I write, and am written.

In adopting a historical perspective, I explore how the subject is simultaneously shaped by the past and engaged in the project of continually reworking the past which has shaped them. Thus I have attempted to problematise the relationship between past and present and suggest that past events are not immutably set for all time. 'Has been' does not mean 'always will be'. Rather, the significance of past events, both personal and cultural, is understood to be subject to selective perception, editing and reformulation in terms of the present day conceptions of reality, truth and knowledge held by the subject.

In adopting a political perspective I explore how the subject is both discursively constructed and a political site of struggle. Thus, subjectivity is understood as a political arena worth struggling over. Subjectivity, as a politics of identity, recognises that subjects are a product of their relationship to, and place within, a diverse range of social practices and power relations within a variety of institutions. Thus, subjectivity is not simply an expression of an innate self but a political construction which can be known through an interrogation of the social and psychological forces that have shaped the making of that identity named 'self'.

In adopting a social perspective I explore how the subject is inscribed mentally, emotionally and bodily as a sexed, gendered and sexualised subject. I explore, too, the social conditions, practices and institutions that make this subjectification both possible and desirable. The subject's personal history of social practices and relationships is physically embodied in the habitual ways in which that body is held and moved, and the purposes for which that body is used. That body is inscribed in, by and through both its location within society and the power that accrues from that location. The subject's location within hierarchical structures of class, race, age and gender result in the formation of particular sorts of bodies, both personal and social. These bodies are thus understood as having meaning and identity through the social categories and discourses through which they are inscribed. The body, as a site for the enfleshment of social categories and meanings, is understood as natural (or normal) within discourses (and discursive practices) informed by binary logic and the dualistic either/or choices they propose: man/woman, male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/ homosexual. An interrogation of the interpretive frame-works, forces, practices and relationships through

which the subject is socially constructed thus dislodges any conceptualisation of the subject as a-historical, a-political or a-social. I thus conceive the subject to be an historical, political and social artefact, and acknowledge that our sense of ourselves as subjects has become so naturalised that the conditions of our own construction have become invisible.

Discourses

I seek out those discourses that understand the subject to be an active participant in the construction of a reality which is constituted through the discourses and practices of the culture in which they find themselves. I seek out too, those discourses that understand that truth, reality, knowledge and common sense are constructed from both individual and collective points of view.

This text, like its author, is a construction, the result of a process that is both motivated and intentional. Thus, this text is not a reflection of a natural world nor a spontaneous expression of its author's subjectivity. We are, my text and I, artifice and illusion, fabrication and invention.

Text means Tissue; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasising, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue - this texture - the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web.

(Barthes, 1994, p.64)

Davies (1994) suggests that there is no self independent of the positions through which we each fabricate ourselves, and through which we are each fabricated. Here, the concept of position is understood to be more fluid than the concept of role, and recognises 'the constitutive force of discourse to make/fabricate the stories or narratives through which meaningful lives are made' (Davies, 1994, p.23). This text, my stories, the multiple narratives through which I fabricate myself and my reality are thus attempts to render my experience meaningful. This text, this fabrication, this self is constructed in the web of my lived experience and the discursive contexts in which I speak, read and write and through which I, and my meanings, am constructed as spoken, written and read.

This web of lived experience and discursive contexts emphasises the 'multi-sided constructedness of ourselves and our worlds' (Lather, 1991, p.21). In creating this text I acknowledge that my simultaneous self-making and world-making is multi-sited. I thus seek structures, discourses, knowledges and theories that admit multiplicity. Yet this multiplicity is not random, unmotivated or neutral. Rather, it is situated within the context of active choice making and struggles for meaning. Further, it is situated within discourses which make the apprehension and articulation of those choices and struggles conceptually possible and capable of conscious, embodied action. Lather describes this combination of theory and action in terms of praxis, 'the self-creative theory through which we make the world' (1991, p.11). For Lather 'the requirements of praxis are theory both relevant to the world and nurtured by actions in it' (1991, pp.11-12). This text then is my praxis, my embodied subjectivity explored through theory which, in turn, informs imagination, knowledge, desire and action. This text, is my attempt to 'produce an awareness of the complexity, historical contingency and fragility of the practices that we invent to discover the truth about ourselves' (Lather, 1991, p.7). In producing this text I seek always to emphasise contingency and fragility and thus seek out those discourses, ideas, visions, structures, and locutions that enable this contingent, fragile, subject to speak.

I seek to make connections across these discourses which illuminate the meanings and knowledges I am attempting to construct. In acknowledging the constructed nature of text, meaning and knowledge, I am opening them to the critical reflection of both author and reader. I am also making them available to the process and conditions of its construction out of the available discourses (Belsey, 1991, p.104).

In constructing a text that seeks out connections across multiple discourses and struggles against universalising, homogenising coherence, the resulting text is not restricted to a 'single, harmonious and authoritative reading' (Belsey, 1991, p.104).

Instead it becomes plural, open to re-reading, no longer an object for passive consumption but an object of work by the reader to produce meaning.

Belsey, 1991, p.104)

It is my intention to create a self-reflective text that in turn invites self-reflexivity; a text which engages the thinker/reader/writer/talker in a process of continual contestation, or continual disruption of the familiar, the taken-for-

granted, the commonsensical. Through this polyvocal text I seek to draw on, rearticulate and amplify voices from other texts and, in so doing, produce an evocative text of fragmented, multiple narratives where meanings proliferate, diverge and coalesce. In aiming for something polyvocal and intertextual I include quotations from other voices, 'that as many speaking subjects we may articulate more fully the complexity, nuance and knowing of our embodied selves' (Flax, 1992, p.204).

Voice

Hence I construct a multiply voiced, or polyvocal text, where some of the voices are more identifiably mine than others', some more others' than mine, and some, a hybrid of many articulated in the illusion of one. Throughout my text quotations from other sources, the words of other authors, are taken out of the contexts in which I found them and reproduced / relocated in my own text. This reproduction of text, as subject to my purposes, may or may not reflect the intended purposes and meanings of their originator. In so doing I have made selections and omissions, left gaps, created inconsistencies, foregrounded that which is chosen and made invisible that which is excluded. I have also attempted to foreground the reflexive, derivative, intertextual, referential, contextual and constructed nature of knowledge, of language and of text. Thus, as speaker/writer I appropriate the voices of others, identifying their origin but mouthing them as my own for my own purposes, to express my own meanings. This is a conceit of ventriloquism: I create an illusion of the author as speaking subject and the text, the spoken, as the dummy.

The third person, impersonal, universal, objective and authoritative voice of academic discourse has historically had more power than the personal, subjective particular voice. Here I attempt to move between them and in so doing 'interrupt academic norms by writing inside another logic, a logic that displaces linearity, clear authorial voice and closure' (Lather, 1991, p.8). Further, in moving between them I seek to dislodge the impersonal/personal, objective/subjective dualisms and the hierarchical relationship between them where the first term of the dyad is privileged over the second. Any use of either the personal or impersonal voice is not done with any claim to truth, universality or objectivity. Both voices are limited by my experience and knowledge of the world and this text is bound by those

limitations. I, my reality, and this text are all three perspectival, partial, contradictory, paradoxical and located within the discourses and discursive practices within which each is constructed. This location, or position

weighs heavily in what knowledge comes to count as legitimate in historically specific times and places. The world is spoken from many sites which are differentially positioned regarding access to power and resources.

(Lather, 1991, p.116)

In contesting the objectivity of phallocentric patriarchal scholarship I seek to construct 'an engaged personal voice, saturated with feeling, values and political protest, a voice which emerges in feminist biography in which subject engages with subject' (Dimen, 1990, p.35). I thus seek a voice, and a style of writing, that is passionate, reflective, personal, political and scholarly.

This voice is personal in that it articulates experiences, memories, dreams, feelings, motivations, desires, and relationships. It also articulates a struggle for meanings and a desire to explore the ways in which these meanings are constructed so that some are made more possible, or desirable, than others.

This voice is political in that it articulates some ways in which the subject might act alone or with others to both imagine and create a world that is more just, more empowering and more liberating than the one in which we now find ourselves. I use stories about myself to introduce the ideas with which I am preoccupied and which constitute the basis of my academic research. Here, the personal and the political are no longer conceived or understood as binary opposites. Rather, the personal becomes political: the personal is political. The emphasis here is on the potential for changing both ourselves and the society beyond us; for changing both the individual and the social body, for linking personal change with political action.

In producing this text I have 'mined my own fears and anxieties' and 'drawn upon my own consciousness' as a resource for theory (Bartky, 1990, p.9). Yet, this 'politics of autobiography' does not 'replace the received patriarchal voice' (Dimen, 1990, p.35): rather, it is used to juxtapose it. In this text, both voices are used to 'generate a sense of opposition, difference, creative tension' (Dimen, 1990, p.35) just as they are used also to demonstrate continuity, similarity and connection. This combination of voices aims also to suggest the intersubjectivity, intertextuality, interrelatedness and indivisibility of author/reader/text and knowledge/knower/known. In so doing it also aims to identify and contest the boundaries that limit apprehension of the

possibilities for speaking, knowing and being beyond those currently available or imaginable. This is a process whereby 'tacit (subjective) and propositional (objective) knowledge are interwoven and mutually informing' (Lather, 1991, p.66). Thus, in reflecting on the construction of my own subjectivity, I hope to illuminate the constitutive effects of the discursive practices through which we are all constituted as subjects - and through which the world we inhabit is perceived, understood and made real.

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralist discourses interrogate the constructed, arbitrary nature of that in culture which is taken to be 'true', 'real' or 'natural' (Davies, 1989, 1993, 1994; Lather, 1991; Weedon, 1987). Such concepts are understood as being founded in first principles or causes upon which hierarchies of meaning are then constructed. These first principles are commonly expressed in binary oppositions, and poststructuralist theory provides discourses through which these oppositions may be deconstructed, contested and transformed, where either/or choices are opened up to multiple possibilities. The subject, as spoken and written into existence through systems of binary thought can equally be spoken and written into new existences 'that partially write over and rub out the old limited and limiting thought systems' (Davies, 1993, pp.176-7). Taken for granted realities, knowledges and subjectivities may thus be erased by the imaginative reconstruction of alternative realities, knowledges and subjectivities. These alternatives propose and explore the possibilities of non-hierarchical, non-oppositional, non-dualistic ways of thinking and being. In exploring the imagined and fictive boundaries of my own subjectivity I aim to contest and transcend these boundaries and imagine ways of thinking and being beyond those in which I have been inscribed and through which I describe myself.

Drawing on poststructuralist theory I proceed on the basis that culture, social relations, knowledge, truth, reality and subjectivity are 'neither fixed or finite' (Lather, 1991, p.xxi) but rather 'dynamic, expansive and intrinsically shaped by power and the struggle against it' (Lather, 1991, p.xxi). Here, unities give way to multiplicities, clarities give way to ambiguities, univocal simplicities give way to polyvocal complexities, and certainties give way to possibilities. These dissolutions result in 'the splintering, disintegrating and

fragmenting effects of the partiality and plurality of contesting voices' (Lather, 1991, p.xvi).

Parallel fictions

I seek to construct a text which is similarly splintered, fragmented and multi-voiced and through which I may explore the intersection of individual consciousness and social context. This text juxtaposes autobiography, literary fiction and academic research, each of which articulate similar preoccupations, each of which is amplified by different discourses and narrative styles. What I seek is 'a way of cutting, of perforating discourse without rendering it meaningless' (Barthes, 1994, p.8) so that 'narrativity is dismantled yet the story is still readable' (Barthes, 1994, p.9) its telling made possible by 'the inhabitation of languages working side by side' (Barthes, 1994, p.4).

In juxtaposing autobiography, literary fiction, academic research and the various discourses and narrative styles through which they are given meaning and voice, I aim to disrupt those dualisms to which all discourses are held captive: impersonal/personal, objective/subjective, collective/individual, self/other, universal/particular, true/false, fact/ fiction.

All three narratives in my text are equally 'made-up': autobiographical fiction, literary fiction, academic fiction. All three narratives in my text are equally factual, their meanings derived from a repertoire of substantive experiences and phenomena. Thus, I conceive both autobiography and academic research as 'factitious', no more true or real than that form of discourse that would ordinarily be identified as fiction, nor less true or real than that form of discourse ordinarily identified as fact. This notion of 'facticity' collapses the dichotomous oppositional distinction between fact and fiction and foregrounds the nature of discourse as constructed through, and situated in, language, metaphor and narrative.

In foregrounding the blurred, ambiguous, constructed and interpretative boundaries between fact and fiction I argue that knowledge, truth, objectivity, reason, subjectivity and reality are powerful fictions, fictions which are themselves the effects of power. These discursive constructions inform our efforts to understand ourselves, our lived experiences and our worlds. I am attempting, in this non-linear, fragmented, polyvocal

text, to capture some sense of the interpretative complexity of our lives. In disrupting the distinction between fact and fiction I suggest that all forms of discourse are

imaginative reconstructions of our world, in so far as that world is mediated through our own and other's interpretative work.

(Mulkay, 1985, p.11)

I thus contest the objective/subjective, fact/fiction, true/false binarisms which have become mapped onto each other as objective/fact/true and subjective/fiction/false. Thus, in claiming all narratives in this text to be fiction I do not assume all to be untrue. Further, in dissolving any opposition between fiction and theory it becomes possible to map each term onto the other, creating a fictional theory or theoretical fiction. This text aims, more in the manner of fiction or poetry, to demonstrate or enact its effects 'through the use of ... repetition, polyvocality, allusion, ambiguity and contradiction' (Oppel, 1993, p.92). This text is thus cumulative, repetitive, personal, perspectival, partial and contextual.

The parallel fictions I propose form a polyvocal narrative which simultaneously connect my personal history with my academic research. Memories of childhood sexual abuse recovered during the writing of this dissertation have informed, motivated, and made more complex (and painful) my reflections on the ways in which social categories, relations of power and life history have inscribed this body and this mind in terms of sex, gender and sexuality. This text is an interrogation of body, mind and emotion as inscribed in, and by, my inner histories and experiences. From it comes a critical reflection upon the nature of sexed/gendered/ sexualised subjectivities and the multiple and complex implications for the construction of individual and social identities.

Purposes

My reflections on personal experience and academic theory reveal my preoccupations and dilemmas with contemporary discourses and debates about subjectivity, agency, sex, gender and sexuality. I seek to disrupt the hegemony of those received, taken-for-granted common sense descriptions and meanings within which these discourses are located. In disrupting the

hegemony of the familiar I attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct some of the current discursive limits within which subjectivity, knowledge and reality are constructed, and in so doing, seek discursive possibilities for both personal and social transformation.

In my reading, my talking, my listening, my writing, I share with others an ambition to explore: the discursive nature of subjectivity, knowledge, reality and truth and the extent to which these are mediated by relations of power; the subject positions made available within culture on the basis of the categories sex, gender and sexuality: the relationship between socially constructed/constrained subjectivities, consciousness, agency and embodied subjectivity; possibilities for both personal and social transformation; the possibility of a social world predicated on reciprocity and mutuality, not hierarchy and exclusion. These explorations, and the text through which they have been made possible and given voice, have been informed by discourses of feminism, poststructuralism and postmodernism. I have sought out theory which

strives for uncertainty through questioning assumptions rather than seeking closure; which tolerates ambiguity, fluidity and contradiction; and which is built on imagining: imagining that things could be different, other, better than they are.

(Vance, 1992, p.144)

CHAPTER ONE: feminism, patriarchy and power

HER STORY

The fog came towards me and the sky that had been clear was covered up ... I began to walk with my hands stretched out in front of me, as do those troubled in sleep, and in this way for the first time, I traced the lineaments of my own face opposite me ... I was invisible then ... I know that these are figments of my mind and nowhere I have been. But does it matter if the place cannot be mapped as long as I can still describe it? ...

There is a black tower where wild beasts live. The tower has no windows and no doors. No one may enter or leave. At the top of the tower is a cage whose bars are made of bone. From this cage a trapped spirit peeps at the sun. The tower is my body, the cage is my skull, the spirit singing to comfort me is me. But I am not comforted, I am alone ...

Did my childhood happen? I must believe that it did, but I don't have any proof ... I will have to assume I had a childhood, but I cannot assume to have had the one I remember ... Everyone remembers things which never happened. And it is common knowledge that people often forget things which did. Either we are all fantasists and liars or the past has nothing definite in it. I have heard people say we are shaped by our childhood. But which one? ...

When I was little my mother took me to see a great wonder. It was about 1633, I think, and never before had there been a banana in England. I saw it held high above a man's head. It was yellow and speckled brown, and as I looked at it I saw the tree and the beach and the white waves below birds with wide wings. Then I forgot it completely. But in my games with ships and plants I was trying to return to that memory, to release whatever it had begun in me.

When Tradescant asked me to go with him as an explorer I thought I might ... bring back something that mattered, and in the process find

something I had lost. The sense of loss was hard to talk about. What could I have lost when I had nothing to begin with? I had myself to begin with, and that is what I lost. Lost it ... in the gap between my ideal of myself and my pounding heart.

Winterson, 1989, pp.14-15, 59, 92, 100-101

These fragments of text, these symbols, this fog, this tower, this wondrous banana represent features of the story I want to tell. They inform the articulation of the narrative of my fictionalised self, life and experience.

Enveloped in a fog of sleep, of not being fully awake, of confusion and obscurity, I have struggled to more carefully delineate, face and recognise that shadowy dimension of self that lay hidden. I have struggled to simultaneously recognise both my childhood and adulthood, to liberate myself from the confining tower, this cage of bones that is my body, in which I have held myself captive. In so doing I have revisited an overlooked past, a childhood that may or may not have happened in the way I have remembered, or indeed forgotten it. Unreliable memory, ambiguous, partial, fictional, formed around a seminal event, lost to consciousness but ever present in that shadowy dimension I began to explore, looking for something I had lost, trying to release whatever it had begun in me. This is my story.

MY STORY

I am a small, weak thing. My boundaries are fragile. A tiny insect on my body, even the anticipation of it, is an excruciating violation. I am vulnerable. Danger is everywhere. The world hurts. My father hurts. Bodies and minds. He is cruel. Unpredictable. Dangerous. I am small, weak, fragile, acquiescent. Powerless. He is a man. Strong. He is the magnetic centre of my universe. The point on which each thing hangs and turns. He brings no joy. No happiness. No comfort. No safety. I hide, cower, hang back. Slide away. Become invisible. Silent. Compliant. Safe. Or not. Not. He is a man. Men are like this. I am not a man. A boy but not male. I am passive, sweet and deferential. I bend and slide. It makes me invisible. Or so I think. I think now, in this fragmented, fragmenting moment that I am broken. A bit of me. Locked now in a dark place. Buried. Hidden. Lost. Abandoned and alone. I am pulled out of the landscape and into a mist that envelops me. Out of the physical, the material, the body, and into a realm beyond. A realm obscured by mist. Only hazy outlines, shadowy shapes suggest the presence of something more tangible. Thus am I. Mist. All is confused, vague, hidden. There is no looking back or beyond. All is concealed. My mind is foggy. I drift, doze, sleep-dream of nothing in particular. Or nothing that memory ushers back to consciousness. For now, I fossilise around this place of closure, protecting some lost possibility, swaddling my loss, my pain, my wound, my grief, my humiliation, my fear, in a numbing forgetfulness. But I remember the man. The danger. The fear. All men are like this. Men are. All men. But I am not a man. No. I am a big boy who is not male. I am a big boy who is not male and I am on a couch. A psychiatrist's couch. I am distressed. Disoriented. Disrupted. My mind is disordered. A face looms. His face. My father's. Laughing. Mocking my weakness. I am pathetic. Powerless, as always. His gloating face another victory, another defeat. Mine. I am a big boy who is not male. I am on a chair this time. In a classroom. Reading, talking, thinking. Safe with women. Who have never hurt me. A light. A key. A door. A path. A way. A place of entry to that hidden shadowy place. A clearing fog. I struggle to go beyond the power of the father to keep me blind. I see it now. The betrayal. The wounding. The abuse of power. The complicity. I smell the musty possibility locked away so long ago. It is pungent and alive in me still. I move toward it. Tentatively.

But I am moving. The fog out there, like the fog in here, will, I know, begin sometime to clear and in clearing reveal a new landscape, a new series of possibilities.

In reflecting on my story I want to conceptualise betrayal as something simultaneously personal and social, where the personal is made possible by the social and the social made possible by the personal. My father's violence, his abuse of power and trust, meant that my home and family, as a place of safety and love, was made vulnerable to his power and the means through which it was expressed. We children were taught, and expected, to defer to the father's authority and this deference was betrayed by exploitation and abuse of the power that this authority conferred upon him. Eschewing violence, and limited by a two-fold choice of ally or victim, I took up the latter position. This position confirmed the power of the father, and his allies, and the powerlessness of those who, like myself, were his victim. I understand now that each of these positions, ally and victim, necessitated compliance and complicity. I understand too, that these positions replicated relations of dominance and subordination, conferring greater power and privilege to the ally than to the victim, to the dominant rather than to the subordinate.

I recognise that my familial relations replicate the structures, institutions and practices that locate power in the hands of those chosen to be powerful. I emphasise the extent to which power is conferred, as I see on one hand no natural/inevitable reasons for power to be allocated to any particular individual or group, nor any natural/inevitable reasons for the obvious disparity of power among different individuals or social groups. Rather, I see that the construction and allocation of power is fully historical, political and social, and argue that in this particular historical/ political/social moment men as a group have greater access to power than any other group. I see that the hierarchical structures through which power is conferred and maintained privilege men, some men more than others, and that this privilege is made invisible by propositions of superior strength, greater capacity for rational thought and other assumptions of the naturalness and fitness of men to rule, provide and protect the weak and dependent. In this way the inequities and disempowering consequences, both individual and social, of such actions come to be recast as protection and as a reflection of a natural order, of human nature.

I suggest that the institutions, structures and practices we are taught to perceive as natural and in our best interest, reproduce those relations of power which maintain the right of men to dominate all social institutions, politics, law, economics, medicine, religion and the armed forces among them. I see also that compliance and complicity with, and deference to and maintenance

of, these institutions amounts to a betrayal of the possibility of a more equitable society. This is also a betrayal of self and other within the context of the structures of power that are believed to provide for and protect us. I argue that patriarchal institutions, structures and practices amount to a betrayal of power and of the possibility of empowerment.

What follows represents an attempt to come to some understanding of power, patriarchy and social relations. This understanding is informed by the discourse of critique made available to me by poststructuralist feminist theory.

OUR STORY

Purpose

In this chapter I locate myself in relation to theories of feminism, patriarchy and power. In so doing I attempt to clear a space from which to articulate my own meanings within sometimes contradictory and competing discourses. This space provides me with a discursive opportunity to write my way to some understanding of my experience of sexual abuse as fundamentally about betrayal and powerlessness. This experience became, imperceptibly, generalised rather than particular to a given moment, a given man, a given context. Thus I am preoccupied with how a fragmented and fragmenting moment became an interpretive framework for all subsequent moments. I am preoccupied too, with understanding why I might have continued to defer to the rule of the father and the father's rules, and with how I might begin to disrupt or subvert them. It is these reflections and preoccupations, as well as the complex relationship between the theories and the position I take up in relation to them, which provide a theoretical context within which the rest of the text is written and may be read.

I recognise the processes through which both author and text are constructed to be historically, politically and socially contingent. Like the text I am constructed in a context and it is my location in this context that I intend to explore.

The politics of location requires each individual to define the historical, cultural, psychic and imaginative boundaries which provide the ground for political definition and self definition, of the subject's body and the social body, and to become critically aware of the relation between experience, identity and political perspective.

(Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994, p.44)

Patriarchy

I locate both author and text within the concept of patriarchy and this location informs my exploration of the relationship between gender and power (Connell, 1991). The concept of patriarchy is used to map a matrix of intersecting institutions, discourses, structures and practices which create, maintain, legitimise and naturalise male hegemony, privilege and power in all aspects of culture and social life. Patriarchal authority is located in hierarchical, dualistic structures which result in the suppression, oppression and marginalisation of difference, of different discourses, knowledges and visions of reality in a variety of complex ways. These patriarchal structures are not ahistorical, apolitical and asocial. Rather, they are understood to be historically, politically and socially produced and seen to take different forms, and develop different supporting ideologies, institutions and practices, in different historical periods, across culture and in varying political contexts (Connell, 1991; Davies, 1991; French, 1992; Weedon, 1991).

Thus, I understand the historical, political and social moment in which I think and write to be located in an oppressive patriarchal regime. This regime is based on hierarchy, opposition and exclusion and is maintained by the differential social privilege and power accorded to a particular form of masculine identity, an identity which excludes all women and some men (Connell, 1991, 1995). Given this paradigm of power, social relationships, and relationships between women and men in particular, are here understood as problematic and in need of interrogation and reconceptualisation. I am thus motivated by a politics where the personal and theoretical, individual and social are brought together in critical reflection on the nature and sources of powerlessness and the systemic and systematic institutions and practices through which such powerlessness is created, maintained and alternatively rendered invisible, meaningless, acceptable or just. Such a politics is motivated toward empowering both individual and collective action to change the conditions under which lives are lived. I am committed to the struggle for social change where the territory between the already and the not yet may be theorised, articulated and negotiated.

Feminist theory and patriarchy

Within feminism there are many ways of understanding the meanings and implications of patriarchy. Different feminist discourses offer different meanings and emphasise a range of sites in which definitions and meanings are constructed. These include sex, gender, sexuality, culture, race, class, biology, politics, psychology, psychoanalysis and economics. I locate my discussion of patriarchy within the theoretical context of poststructuralist feminism as made available to me by Weedon. (1991) Weedon acknowledges that every form of feminist theory or politics implies a particular way of understanding patriarchy and that these different ways of perceiving and resisting patriarchy result in different forms of feminist politics, each of which have different implications for cultural action. Based on Kristeva (1981) she identifies three forms of feminism; liberal feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism (Weedon, 1991, p.4).

Liberal feminism aims for full equality of opportunity in all spheres of life without radically changing the present social and political system. Radical feminism envisions a new social order in which women are not subordinate to men. This necessitates separation from men and patriarchal social structures. Socialist feminism recognises that gender is not ahistorical but rather socially produced, and reproduced, in different epochs. In this view, oppression on the basis of sex, gender, sexuality, race, class and other divisive discursive categories, is integral to patriarchy and can only be transcended by 'a full transformation of the social system' (Weedon, 1991, p.4). Within these various definitions and theories patriarchy is understood as the institutionalised dominance of men over women.

Whilst I acknowledge that definitions of patriarchy may be variously produced and understood, I support the view which emphasises that it is neither unassailable nor biologically inevitable (Roberts, 1992, p.14). I locate this text within a theoretical framework made available to me through feminist critique and inquiry, especially as understood through the work of Davies (1989, 1993, 1994), Lather (1991) and Weedon (1991). They articulate a range of possible strategic interventions through which patriarchal identities, knowledges, realities, structures, practices and social relations may be contested. I recognise that these structures and practices are mediated by power and that the distribution of this power is mediated by variables such as sex, gender, sexuality, race, class, socioeconomic status and age. Thus, given

that not all men are equally powerful, nor all women similarly powerless, variable and competing masculinities and femininities are produced. Drawing on the work of Davies (1989, 1993, 1994), Lather (1991) and Weedon (1991) I understand socialist feminism to be synonymous with poststructuralist feminism. Poststructuralist feminism is here understood as a politics of change which enables analysis, critique and reconstruction of patriarchal structures and practices in ways that potentially transform and transcend the paradigm of power within which current relations between women and men, and variably inscribed social subjects, are situated.

In recognising various and variable feminisms I do not conceive of feminism as a monolithic structure. Rather, I acknowledge different feminisms, differently positioned in relation to theories of sociopolitical relations between women and men, each with different assumptions, goals and recommendations for action. Like Lather (1991), I see feminism as a liberatory politics which is praxis oriented and emphasises theory based action. Praxis is the 'self creative activity through which we make the world' motivated by theory 'both relevant to the world and nurtured by actions in it' (Lather, 1991, p.11). Praxis is theory in action.

Feminism has only working definitions since it is a dynamic, constantly changing ideology with many aspects including the personal, the political and the philosophical. It can never simply be a belief system. Without action, feminism is merely empty rhetoric which cancels itself out.

(Roberts, 1992, p.13)

Poststructuralist feminism provides a theoretical framework which enables me to both reflect on the ways in which patriarchy is constructed and search for perspectives which make sense of the obvious disparity in power between women and men, the often violent consequences of that power for women and some men, and the extent to which both women and men are complicit in its maintenance. I will expressly avoid detailed reference to either individual or systematic global acts that subjugate women and children through the denial of rights and freedoms, or through material deprivation and violence in its many forms. These are taken as axiomatic and have been thoroughly documented by Faludi (1992), French (1992) and Wolf (1991). Rather, I will focus on the mechanisms by which patriarchy, as a system of maintaining differential status and power between women and men, is structured and perpetuated, for 'only when we know how we have been shaped by the structures of power in which we live can we become shapers' (Starhawk, 1990, p.8).

Patriarchy is understood as more than simply the oppression of women by men. Rather, it is a 'hegemonic, hierarchical system of exclusions of feminist, non-white, non-heterosexual and non-middle-class interests' (Weedon, 1991, p.140). Men caught up in the dynamics of patriarchy seek not only to dominate women, but other men as well (Moore & Gillette, 1990; Connell, 1991, 1995).

Whilst patriarchal relations are structural, existing in social institutions and practices, they are also manifest in the everyday behaviours, relations, beliefs and practices of individual women and men. The relationship between the individual and the social incorporates the relationship between experience and social power. Analysis of patriarchal social structures and the positions women and men occupy within them foregrounds the forms of social organisation and the social meanings and values which hold them in place and through which they may be contested. Such analysis also foregrounds and theorises 'individual consciousness...(and)...the relation between language, subjectivity, social organisation and power' (Weedon, 1991, p.12). Thus, like Weedon, I seek out those discourses within feminism that articulate a theory of 'subjectivity, of conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions, which can account for the relationship between the individual and the social' (Weedon, 1991, p.3).

Structuralist and liberal humanist positions inadequately theorise and articulate the complexity of the relationship between subjectivity and power. Within this tradition, the dialectical relationship between 'what people were struggling to become within themselves and the prevailing relationship of power and subordination' is obscured (Seidler, 1989, p.x). There is not, according to this view, any tension between human agency and social structures, nor any sense that social structures are themselves outcomes of social relationships.

Structuralism assumes that a structure has a centre, a fundamental ground, from which everything about that structure emanates, is understood and is capable of explanation. That centre is also the origin from which all aspects of the structure are presumed to inevitably unfold. The assumption of a stable fundamental centre implies a state of immobility, finality, and of fixed, absolute truth. Structuralist and liberal humanist conceptions of identity thus propose a self that is fixed, coherent, innate and genetically determined; an authentic essential self (Cameron, 1990; Davies, 1991, 1993, 1994; Tarnas, 1991; Weedon, 1991).

Structuralist and liberal humanist positions assume a fixity where I argue none necessarily exists, and assume an incapacity for change where I argue change is possible. Thus, given my interest in personal and social transformation, structuralist and liberal humanist positions are dismissed in favour of poststructuralist feminism.

Feminism as a politics of change

Poststructuralist feminist critique contests the pre-given, taken for granted meanings upon which social relations and practices are constructed. Meanings are understood as political and located within social networks and relations of power and knowledge. Such a politics is directed at changing existing social relations and transforming patriarchal power relations. It is only when established meanings, values and power relations are no longer taken for granted that it is possible to demonstrate where they come from, whose interests they serve, how they maintain ascendancy and where they are vulnerable to disruption and transformation.

The poststructuralist concept of subjectivity offers greater potential for provoking and enabling inner and outer change than the liberal humanist concept of an innate, essential and fixed self (Weedon, 1991, pp.12-13). From a poststructuralist perspective, patriarchy, which implies a fundamental organising of power on the basis of biological sex, is not natural and inevitable, but socially produced (Weedon, 1991, p.127). If patriarchy is a social construction then patriarchal subjects are similarly socially produced.

The concept of subjectivity, of a socially constructed identity negotiated by the subject within the boundaries of social institutions, practices and possibilities, makes visible the process of subjectification. It is through socially produced discourses that these practices are made available and subject positions taken up. Thus, 'conflict, contestation and contradiction are a part of a subject's relation to a discourse and the relations between different discourses are also open to these kind of struggles as well' (Jackson, 1990, p.269).

Personal and social transformation is enabled through the development of a critical perspective through which individuals can begin to see how social practices are organised to support certain interests. This understanding forms the basis for active political intervention directed toward social change.

Transformation is thus a fusion of the personal and the social, a fusion of theory and practice. A subject constantly in the process of construction and capable of change is thus open to the possibility of transformation and reconstruction. Personal and social change arise from critical reflection and action, from both questioning and contesting assumptions about how we develop as social subjects. This involves critical deconstruction of how we are historically and socially formed as subjects in a patriarchal society and has implications for how conventional social relations and identities may be reconstructed. Our sense of identity is thus understood as having been historically produced in a series of social practices within different discursive frameworks. These frameworks offer a set of discursively produced subject positions which may be taken up, resisted or rejected by particular subjects. Further, these discursive frameworks may be opened up to encompass a wider range of possible subject positions. Given the relationship between patriarchy, power, gender, subjectivity and social organisation, critique of patriarchy also involves critique of these manifestations and material effects of patriarchal ideology and practice. The critique of patriarchy, power, gender and subjectivity begins in this chapter and is taken up and extended later in the text.

Sex and gender

In recognising the relationship between theories of patriarchy and power, I focus on relationships between women and men as enactments of patriarchal power. I recognise that theories of patriarchy intersect with theories of sex and gender and that the concept of gender includes some direct relationship to the issue of power (Eisenstein, 1991; Connell, 1991, 1995; Weedon, 1991). Given this view, theories of gender are understood as fundamentally about relations of domination and subordination and the ways in which these relations are constructed and perpetuated. Indeed, Fromm (1990) observes that the exercise of power over those who are weaker is central to the maintenance of patriarchy.

Segal (1990) argues that patriarchal structures 'create masculinity as enactments of power over women, men and things' (Segal, 1990, p.120) and that the maintenance of men's power over women cannot be reduced to a single or primary cause. Rather, power, as a structure, involves all the institutions of authority, control and coercion.

Connell (1991) suggests that questions about why this relationship exists might be better replaced by questions about how. By avoiding questions about 'ultimate origins, root causes or final analyses' (Connell 1991, p.63) Connell suggests that debate might be more fruitfully focussed on the ways in which gender relations are organised and maintained. If, as Connell argues, the structure is not pre-given, but historically composed, 'then it is possible to find different ways of structuring gender' (Connell, 1991, p.63).

Eisenstein (1990) acknowledges that the subordination of women under patriarchy is a complex matter. It is, she maintains, obscured by the fact that the means by which men assert their dominance are not necessarily visible. Rather, dominance is maintained by the 'continual reproduction of an ideology that reinforces a separation between male and female roles' (Eisenstein, 1990, p.4). The reproduction of these roles, and hence of gender relations, involves an interplay between personal lives and social structures. Gilbert and Taylor (1991) acknowledge that every day social practices constitute social structure. Further, this structure is historically constructed on the basis of power relations between women and men.

Where the gender order is subject to patriarchal ideology it is characterised by emphasised femininity and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1991). Connell observes that hegemonic masculinity is constructed on the

basis of the dominance of men over women, as well as other forms of subordinated masculinity (1991, p.187). It is heterosexual and tends to be characterised by power, authority and aggression (Connell, 1991, p.187). Emphasised femininity is the form of femininity preferred as complement to hegemonic masculinity. It is characterised by compliance with subordination and accommodation to the interests and desires of men. It emphasises sociability, sexual passivity and acceptance of motherhood and domesticity (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.10). I recognise these versions of masculinity and femininity in my own family, in the actions, thoughts, beliefs and attitudes within which family members and familial relations were inscribed. Thus inscribed, and with no alternative versions available to me, I aligned myself with the position ascribed to emphasised femininity: passivity, compliance and subordination. This was an early disruption of the assumed mimetic relationship between sex and gender.

Whilst a number of versions of femininity and masculinity are constructed in everyday social practices, emphasised femininity and hegemonic masculinity are represented, at the symbolic level, as the cultural ideals. Yet, these ideological representations of femininity and masculinity do not necessarily correspond to actual, lived femininities and masculinities. As Connell recognises, these ideological representations tend to be 'stylised and impoverished ... Their interrelation ... centred on a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women' (1991, p.183). The subordination of women is therefore essential to patriarchal structures, and to masculinity itself.

Stoltenberg (1990) asserts that the cultural norm of human identity is, by definition, male identity and that under patriarchy, the cultural norm of male identity 'consists in power, prestige, privilege, and prerogative as over and against the gender class women. That's what masculinity is' (Stoltenberg, 1990, p.74). Men are thus the arbiters of identity for both females and males.

Whilst men in general are advantaged through the subordination of women, I suggest that relations between men and women do not involve 'confrontation between homogeneous blocs' (Brod, 1987, p.90). Rather, the categories female and male are fragmented by the creation of a range of subordinated femininities and masculinities. These fissures or divisions are created on the basis of sexuality, class, race, religion, power, status and any other criterion which differentiates individuals from the positions prescribed by emphasised femininity and hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is, however, the descriptor of all humanity, and the basis upon which all subject positions are formulated. It also legitimises and reproduces

the social relationships that generate their dominance. Yet, like Brod (1987) I recognise that this culturally exalted form of masculinity may only correspond to the actual characters of small numbers of men (Brod, 1987, p.92). It is clear, says Connell (1991) that most men do not fit the image of 'tough, dominant and combative masculinity that the ideologists of patriarchy sell' (Connell, 1991, p.109). I argue, like Connell, that normative definitions of masculinity are problematic in that not many men actually meet the normative standard (Connell, 1991)

Indeed the number of men rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small, yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women.

(Connell, 1995, p.79)

This contradiction between the cultural ideal and the lived reality necessitates the construction of a hierarchy among men. Connell notes that this hierarchy has three basic elements: hegemonic masculinity; conservative masculinities, 'complicit in the collective project but not its shock troops' (1991, p.110); and subordinated masculinities. Within this hierarchy all forms of masculinity are constructed with reference to the hegemonic model. I suggest, too, that all forms of femininity are constructed with reference to this model, and reflect the inherent subordination of women to men upon which it is based. Therefore the organisation of a hegemonic form based on dominance of the other sex is absent from the social construction of femininity. As Connell notes, constructions of femininity which emphasise compliance, nurturance and empathy are hardly in a position to establish hegemony over other kinds of femininity in the way that hegemonic masculinity is able to do over other masculinities (Connell, 1991). I suggest also that central to the maintenance of emphasised femininity and hegemonic masculinity is the silencing of alternative subject positions (Connell, 1991, p.188). Subject positions which disrupt the assumed mimetic relationship between sex and gender tend to be marginalised and subjected to discourses of abnormality, deviance, immorality, insanity and illegality, each sustained through those religious, medical and legal institutions, structures and practices which make such articulations possible, plausible and acceptable. Alternative subject positions, those positions which lie beyond the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity, are thus defined as socially undesirable and met with punitive consequences. As a child I learned that my lack of an appropriate masculinity, and later my homosexuality, made me vulnerable and, to the extent that my subject position was invisible and silent, simply left out, not represented in my social context, I learned that invisibility and silence were the safest positions for me to take up.

At the same time as hegemonic masculinity has subordinated women, by defining and controlling the historical and social constructions of femininity, it has also in my view marginalised and subordinated other men (Brod, 1987, p.91). The general connection between power, authority and men is complicated and partly contradicted by the fact that some groups of men are denied access to this power and authority.

The construction of hierarchies of authority is, I propose, essential to both patriarchal structures and masculinity. Despite the fact that the hegemonic model does not necessarily represent all men, nor accord them all its privileges and powers, large numbers of men are complicit in sustaining it. Hegemonic masculinity sustains the power of the powerful and provides a model to which large numbers of men ascribe, and are therefore motivated to support. This complicity is due largely to the fact that most men benefit from the subordination of women, and implies 'the maintenance of practices that institutionalise men's dominance over women' (Connell, 1991, p.185).

The oppression of women could not succeed without the co-operation of individual men (French, 1991). Further, these individual acts could not succeed without the support and co-operation of the patriarchal systems and structures which institutionalise the oppression of women. 'Men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command. They also gain a material dividend' (Connell, 1995, p.82). That large numbers of men derive some benefit from the hegemonic project but do not necessarily see themselves as embodying hegemonic masculinity is made possible through complicity with the hegemonic project (Connell, 1995, p.82).

I recognise that hegemonic masculinity is central to the institutionalised domination of women. 'It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic so far as it embodies a successful strategy in relation to women' (Brod, 1987, p.92). The concept of hegemony refers to 'the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life' (Connell, 1995, p.77) and is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between the cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual.

At any time, one form of masculinity rather than others is exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.

(Connell, 1995, p.77)

The domination of women, by men, and their exclusion from most of the areas of power open to men is fundamental to patriarchal institutions. Central to the idea of maleness 'seems to be the idea of power as male power, with females having power only in the domestic realm or as helpers of men in the male sphere' (Davies, 1991, p.138).

The social institutions we enter as individuals, families, schools, church, work and so on, pre-exist us and 'we learn their modes of operation and the values they seek to maintain as true, natural and good' (Weedon, 1991, p.3). It is this belief in truth, naturalness and goodness which I believe must be contested if the hegemony of patriarchy is to be disrupted.

Power

An understanding of patriarchy as a structural mode of organisation, which places women and men 'in different positions in social, economic and interpersonal relations' (Groz, 1990, p.149) is the starting point for a disruptive analysis of gender relations. It is also, I believe, necessary to examine theories of power in order to do this.

There exist many theories of dominance, oppression and power. Miller defines power as the ability to simultaneously advantage oneself and control, limit 'and where possible destroy' the power of others (Miller, 1991, p.116). This process involves an examination of how power is exercised, for oneself and over others. Such an examination implies that those with power can organise those who are less powerful according to their own needs.

Drawing on Connell's theory of power as 'a balance of advantage or an inequality of resources in a workplace, a household, or a larger institution' (Connell, 1991, p.107). I recapitulate the feminist argument that women are oppressed because men have power over them. Consequently women's oppression can only be changed by contesting and breaking this power. What is foregrounded here is the relationship between gender and power, and how relations of power function as a social structure. As elaborated in what follows, I begin to interrogate how this structure imposes constraints on social practice and how social power is a function of the ability of one group to impose definitions, set terms, formulate ideals and define morality in ways that advantage them and disadvantage others. In my attempt to explore my own experience of powerlessness, I recognise 'how much men's control over women resembles one group's control over other powerless populations' (Fromm, 1990, p.187). I also recognise how the exercise of power is legitimated by the authority of those who exercise it and the extent to which patriarchal power structures imply a necessary connection of authority with masculinity. It is important, I think, to explore how such power structures are

naturalised and rendered invisible, so much so that we are unaware of the relations of domination in which we are embedded. Indeed, 'Our conditioning to obey authority is the foundation of the culture of domination. It is embedded in us so deeply that we are rarely aware of it' (Starhawk, 1990, p.11).

My conditioning to defer to the authority of my father, and to other men in socially designated positions of power, was successful to the extent that it required no act of coercion. The fear of possible negative, even violent, consequences was sufficient to secure my deference. I was complicit, and deferred automatically, unquestioningly and unfailingly. This seemed appropriate behaviour, part of those everyday practices which maintained social order. I deferred to my father, the school principal, the doctor and so on, continuing to do so as an adult, mistaking deferral for respect. I recognise that such unconscious collusion sustains those relations of power which connect masculinity with authority.

In recognising the tension between the social and the individual I make a distinction between the power which men as a sex maintain collectively in society at large and the 'struggles of individual men to live up to this ideal of themselves' (Seidler, 1989, p.147). Drawing on the work of Seidler (1984) I suggest that men learn to assume positions of authority and exercise power through dominance and coercion. What is at issue here is the suggestion that men learn to assume superiority and to believe that if they don't have control 'they are not being masculine' (Seidler, 1991, p.35). My desire to write my way to some understanding of my own powerlessness makes it clear that whilst men oppress women, men too may be oppressed. Subordinate masculinities are oppressed as are those men who fail to live up to the images and expectations prescribed by the hegemonic model. French (1992) acknowledges that men everywhere are oppressed by racial, religious, economic and political factors. My oppression as a homosexual male is thus understood in terms of the social/political meanings attached to my often feminised non-hegemonic subject position.

I acknowledge that the power relations in which institutionalised power structures are embedded do not deny that both individual men and women may be agents of oppression (Weedon, 1991). Where sex and gender intersect with sexuality, class, race, wealth and political affiliation, power relations become more complex. Given these variables men can be seen to oppress both women and other men, and women can be seen to oppress some men and other women. However, Weedon (1991) recognises that these

individual variations of power, ascribed on bases other than gender, in no way contradict the global dominance and power that men may be observed to exercise over women.

It is this observation of Weedon's that I put at the centre of my attempt to articulate, 'a theory which explains how and why people oppress each other' (Weedon, 1991, p.3). Such theory will need to explore both the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions that shape subjectivity and account for the relationship between the individual and the social. The challenge for me then, is to explore what it is that links particular, individual, acts of oppression to the more general, systematic and systemic forms. This necessitates investigation of the mechanisms by which dominance and oppression are constructed and perpetuated and ultimately the actions by which they may be transformed. Such transformation is not possible 'without challenging the relationship of power and subordination in the different contexts in which gender relations are constituted' (Seidler, 1991, p.42). The retelling of my experience of sexual abuse is not simply an act of self-disclosure. Rather, I am simultaneously struggling to understand the various contexts that make such abuse possible and imagine different contexts in which relationships based on power, dominance and subordination may be transformed and, indeed, cease to exist.

Power is a much more complex concept than a simple matter of 'haves' and 'have-nots' (Davis, 1987). In my view such a conception can only lead to an over-estimation of the power of the powerful and may obscure their weaknesses as well as the many ways in which the less powerful are able to exercise control over their own lives, 'even in situations where stable, institutionalised power relations are in operation' (Davis, 1987, p.13). Though the exercise of power involves differential access to resources, rights and skills, power relations 'are always reciprocal, involving some degree of autonomy and dependence in each direction' (Segal, 1990, p.61). Whilst individual or particular transactions of power may be easily observed, they often obscure the existence of a less visible power structure in the form of 'a set of social relations with some scope and permanence' (Formaini, 1987, p.107).

Power and personal relationships

To grapple with the relationship between structure and individual actions an analysis of the relationship of the dominant to the subordinated is necessary. Dominant groups inevitably have the greatest influence in determining, and creating, culture. The dominant group holds all of the open power and authority and determines the ways in which this power may be exercised. The philosophy, morality, social theory, language, knowledge and other cultural artefacts created by the dominant group legitimise unequal social relationships and incorporate them into the ideologies and practices that produce and reproduce culture. In this way the dominant group becomes the model for 'normal' human behaviour and relationships. In adhering to the dominant pattern it is then considered normal to subordinate those who have been defined as other and inferior. 'Even though most of us do not like to think of ourselves as either believing, or engaging in such domination, it is in fact, difficult for a member of a dominant group to do otherwise' (Miller, 1991, p.8). For, after all, participation in the pattern of dominance is considered to be normal.

As Miller (1991) recognises, the dominant group prefers to avoid or deny the existence of inequality. It achieves this by explaining its relationship to the subordinate group in terms of a belief that they share the same interests, and even to some extent, a common experience. In maintaining this belief the dominant group suppresses any challenge to its hegemony and believes itself justified in doing so: it is, after all, acting for and protecting the rights of all. In so far as the dominant group is seduced by its own hegemony and convinced that its dominance is right, good and natural, any challenge is perceived as threat and met with hostility. The subordinate group, motivated by basic survival, therefore avoids direct, honest responses and open, self-initiated action. Such action frequently results in economic hardship, coercive force, social ostracism and diagnosis of a personality disorder. It is therefore, 'not surprising ... that a subordinate group resorts to disguised and indirect ways of acting and reacting' (Miller, 1991, p.10). Such behaviours maintain, rather than change, the system that oppresses them. Positions of complicity can be maintained even when they are no longer needed. In my own case, the powerlessness that I learned as a child positioned me to defer to the power of men, not because of their individual actions but because of the position I took up as an adult in relation to male hegemony. In exploring this question of complicity I am attempting a self-reflexive critique of the ways in which I have assumed since childhood, a subject position within which I have inscribed myself as other, as weak, powerless, passive, inferior and

subordinate. In recognising the childhood origin of this position I am confronted, as an adult, with the shocking realisation that this position is habitual, unnecessary, and indeed unhelpful to my functioning as an adult. Recognition of complicity is thus confronting and painful, yet, I am firmly convinced, critical to both personal and social transformation. Such recognition brings with it a sense of responsibility which is fundamental to a belief in the possibility of change and of the will to action.

While I recognise that patriarchy is a political system in which men determine, by way of ritual, religion, tradition, law, language, custom, education, economics and force, the part women play in society, a part in which 'the female is everywhere subsumed under the male' (Rich, 1976, p.58), I acknowledge the force of Coward's suggestion that power is not simply a fact of men's greater access to, and dominance of, the social institutions which structure authority and relations of power. Power is 'also lived out in emotional relationships' (Coward, 1984, p.141).

It is important not to oversimplify relationships between men and women in terms of women as victims of men. Given Dinnerstein's (1987) assertion that relationships between women and men are not 'a conspiracy imposed by bad, physically strong and mobile, men on good physically weak and burdened, women' (Dinnerstein, 1987, p.176), then women cannot simply be seen as the historical victims of intrinsically violent men. Rather, the relationship between the sexes is maintained through an unconscious collusion between women and men. Traditional gender roles embody a female-male symbiosis, a symbiosis based on 'the most cherished of ideas, that of physical and emotional love between men and women' (Eisenstein, 1990, p.14).

Important in maintaining this collusion is the recognition that sexual love is a crucial part of the ideological structure that 'perpetuates male power over women with their full participation' (Eisenstein, 1990, p.14). For Dinnerstein (1987) the act of falling in love is no metaphor; each time a woman falls in love with a man she literally falls into, and repeats, the social patterns that reinforce both the individual and collective subordination of women. This situation is paradoxical, for whilst the family is a place of subordination, even violence, for many women, as it was for me, it is also a place of comfort and love. What is required then, is a theory which adequately describes the complex contexts in which choices are made. 'We have to be careful that our theories can illuminate these contradictory feelings and experiences rather than force us to make false choices' (Seidler, 1991, p.34).

In rethinking what I might mean by collusion, I draw on Friere's (1990) pedagogy of oppression. He theorises social relations in terms of the reproduction of the range of actions through which the oppressed are employed to accept and perpetuate their own oppression. Both oppressor and oppressed are therefore complicit in maintaining the system of oppression. I see this as consistent with Lerner's thesis that patriarchy is 'a historic creation formed by men and women' (Lerner, 1986, p.212). Whilst patriarchy is characterised by men's sexual dominance over women, and the exploitation of some men by other men, it can only function with the co-operation of women. This co-operation is secured by various means, including: gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; physical force or threat of force; restraints, sanctions and coercion; discrimination in access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to women who conform to patriarchal expectations and roles (Lerner, 1986)

Women have for millennia participated in the process of their own subordination because they have been psychologically shaped so as to internalise the idea of their own inferiority.

(Lerner, 1986, p.218)

As Coward (1992) observes, female passivity, the desire to be desired, and the tendency to hand control over to men, are taught and learned at an early age. This early learning shapes expectations about sexual roles and behaviour, the effectiveness of which is evidenced by the fact that despite contemporary changes in the family, girls and boys 'are not free to break with deep feminine and masculine identifications' (Coward, 1992, p.177).

It follows then that children are reared to become adults who are 'emotionally predisposed to consent, at whatever cost, to the prevailing male-female arrangements' (Dinnerstein, 1987, p.35), arrangements where public power is allocated exclusively to the male sphere. This allocation of power to men is not necessarily achieved by means of force, but rather, by engineering the consent of women. Consent is achieved by conditioning women to accept that their subordinate status is a natural outcome of their gender. These roles are thoroughly internalised by women and men and are therefore a powerful mechanism by which they are both kept subject to the rules of patriarchy.

Yet it is important, I think, to recognise that the consent of women and men to the rules of patriarchy is not easily withdrawn. Law, custom, economic pressure, religion, education and social practice all impede such action. Just as Connell (1985) has identified the ways in which all men are

implicated in the maintenance of patriarchy and the subordination of women, Dinnerstein (1987) recognises the ways in which all women are implicated in their own oppression. She is aware that the implications of her argument may be controversial, even unpalatable. Yet, I argue, unless women can acknowledge the part they play in the maintenance of oppressive relationships, they will be less able to make choices which lead to changes in the range of subject positions available to them.

I acknowledge, like Dinnerstein (1987) and Coward (1992), that discussions of complicity and collusion are potentially problematic, especially within a feminist discourse which focuses on male power. Placement of power as the central issue in the construction of gender relations recognises the unequal power relations between women and men. Axiomatic to this view is the fact that it is men who hold, or have access to, economic, social and political power. Such argument assumes that women's co-operation is a function of coercion rather than collusion. Yet, women are not 'innocent victims of men's lust for power' (Coward, 1992, p.13). They have had, Coward asserts, both opportunity and sufficient power to demand significant changes. 'That they have not done so is insufficiently explained in terms of women's passivity and ignorance' (Coward, 1992, p.13).

The passivity of women, as expressed most fully by emphasised femininity, is deeply implicated in the subjectivity of both women and men, and is manifest in their relationships (Coward, 1992). This internal account of oppression, passivity, and complicity, combined with social factors, powerfully militates against change. Coward observes that despite any perceived gains in women's struggles against oppression they have still had an 'unspoken agenda' (1992, p.7) that makes change difficult. This agenda has been to assure men that they are not required to change, that it is women who will accept responsibility for, and do the work necessary to achieve, the desired change. As a result, despite the work of feminism, there has been no change to male hegemony and any contestation has been met with hostility and resistance (Coward, 1992; Faludi, 1992; French, 1992). It seems to me that the experience and status of women in patriarchy will not change until men themselves change. 'Indeed, any real improvement in the quality of life for men and women will involve radical changes in men' (Coward, 1992, p.7). Yet, whilst feminists have engaged in analysis of patriarchal institutions and the gendered subject positions produced both within them and through relations of power, Weedon observes that men have

hardly begun to look at the social construction of masculinity and the ways in which patriarchal power is exercised through subject positions open only, or most often to them.

(1991, p.173)

In restating what collusion and complicity might mean I suggest that both women and men have avoided confrontation with the system of values that privilege certain men (Coward, 1992). Instead, women have acquiesced, conformed, adapted 'Rather than change they seem at best, to have learned how to adjust to intolerable situations' (Faludi, 1992, p.385). I suggest that women are reluctant to confront men, fearing that asking them to change will involve the loss of their love and support (Coward, 1992; Faludi, 1992). This does not deny that women may fear a range of reprisals, including physical violence. As a consequence the gender stereotypes and the traditional expectations of the family, and women's role within it, remain largely unchanged. 'Indeed neither seem to have lost any of their appeal as the prime attraction and responsibility' (Coward, 1992, p.8). Women, embedded in the romantic discourse of home and family, continue to seek love from men, who, embedded in a discourse of dominance and denial, are unable to give it. Whilst men have been complicit in keeping traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity alive, women have been similarly engaged and complicit, in keeping alive the traditional forms of femininity, 'willingly or at least without too much complaint' (Coward, 1992, p.9).

Coward argues that the belief in women as historical victims of powerful patriarchs makes 'a travesty of ordinary people's experience of the mutual interdependence of men and women' (Coward, 1992, p.137). She does not deny, however, that for women this relationship often results in exploitation, abuse or oppression (Coward, 1992, p.197). The belief in individual responsibility and choice functions to sustain oppression and women's embeddedness in patriarchy should not be read as contentment with contemporary gender relations.

Contesting patriarchy

It is my argument that any challenge to patriarchy must challenge the 'hegemonic, hierarchical, dualistic system of definitions' (Weedon, 1991, p.139) upon which it is constructed. I recognise that the imbalance of power

in patriarchal relations between men and women is 'constituted through any discourse which holds the dualism intact' (Segal, 1990, p.138). Such a reading of the centrality of discourses and discursive practices to the structure and maintenance of patriarchy suggests that any challenge to the hegemonic definitions upon which it is constructed will make possible the creation of alternative sets of meanings and values, as well as alternative conceptions of what constitutes humanity, society and culture.

I recognise that any quest for equality between men and women undertaken within the existing patriarchal order may leave the patriarchal duality of female and male intact, as well as the many dualisms that derive from it (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991). Indeed, these dualities are often invoked, and inverted, in the quest for liberty. Demands for the equal access of women to those aspects of the dualistic equation traditionally reserved for men does little more than maintain compliance with the patriarchal order of discourse. It reconstructs the binary thinking that creates a binary world. What we need instead are other discourses 'that are not predicated upon these dualities' (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.26). It is only once society is 'freed from the tyrannous law of masculinity, ways of relating will come into being other than those currently prescribed' (Sellers, 1991, p.17).

To contest patriarchy it is necessary to dislodge the relationship between power and social relations. Power needs to be rethought or reconceptualised in ways that make change possible. It is this issue of power that I put at the centre of my attempt to imagine and articulate a conceptualisation of relationships which are no longer predicated on oppression, dominance or subordination. I am struggling, through this text, to imagine and articulate a position that empowers me to create and sustain relationships from which enactments of patriarchal power are absent.

Power is located in patriarchal structures which 'create masculinity as enactments of power-over women, men and things' (Segal, 1990, p.129). It is thus necessary to consider the problem of male power as a political reality, and avoid placing the burden of change on women rather than on men themselves. This implies that feminist action must not simply focus on women as the locus of change but on men as well. This will involve shared, unified, organised and co-operative action. The problem is not one of gender difference, but of gender hierarchy, a hierarchy founded on male supremacy and female subjugation. Gender, then, is not fundamentally about difference, but about power (Eisenstein, 1991).

In order to dislodge current notions of power I suggest, like Friere, (1990) that transformation of an oppressive reality requires a theory of transforming action. Feminism, defined by Weedon as 'an analysis of a system of oppression and ... a blue print for fundamental social change' (Weedon, 1991, p.98) offers such a theory. Transforming action involves, 'the ideological effort that goes into negating, defusing and challenging the historically dominant meaning of gender in particular periods' (Barrett, 1981, p.111). The many different and contradictory feminist positions locate points of resistance which fracture and weaken patriarchal structures. Weakened, they may be contested and changed. Like Lerner (1990) I recognise that stepping outside patriarchal thinking necessitates scepticism of 'every known system of thought; being critical of all assumptions, ordering values and definitions' (Lerner, 1990, p.228).

In contesting and unmasking patriarchal ideologies I want to think about ways of disrupting dominant understandings of gender and current constructions of gender relations. In exploring these issues I am attempting to identify some of the processes by which the reproduction of gender ideology and the maintenance of male hegemony is achieved. Barrett (1981) suggests that the processes of stereotyping, compensation and collusion describe the ways in which ideology functions to construct and manipulate reality. In recapitulating each of these processes I intend to make visible how patriarchal ideology holds current relations of gender in place.

Firstly, I contend that all patriarchal institutions are structured on the basis of stereotypical thinking about gender (Barrett, 1981). Stereotypes generate preconceived ideas about individuals, groups or objects, and may ascribe a differential value to them. Patriarchal structures generate stereotypic thinking about gendered subjectivities. Biology is appropriated as ideology and traits assigned to men are prized, privileged and ascribed highest value. Traits assigned to women, though determined by their reproductive biology and hence crucial to the perpetuation of the species, are none the less more likely to position them as marginal to historical, social and political reality.

Secondly, I suggest that women are compensated for their lack of power. Compensation refers to the process by which women are offered palliative rewards for the systematic denial of rights and opportunities they experience and are expected to accept without criticism. Physical protection, limited power in the home and family, economic dependence in the guise of freedom from work, and higher moral value as the 'gentle sex', are among the compensations offered for being woman and subordinate. These

compensations for oppression function primarily to silence and disempower women. Silenced and disempowered they are less able, and less likely, to challenge the oppressor.

Thirdly, I recognise that attempts to manipulate women's consent to their subordination involves collusion, in the form of willing consent to and the internalisation of, oppression. As already discussed, women, embedded in patriarchal structures and stereotypes, and compensated for their subordination within them, are manipulated to collude in the maintenance of their own state of oppression (Barrett, 1981; Coward, 1992).

While it is important to identify how patriarchal structures are held in place, it is also important to analyse different kinds of power if the relationship of power and gender is to be deconstructed and contested. Starhawk (1990) identifies three forms of power; power-over, power-with and power-from-within. In reflecting on these I am attempting to conceptualise possibilities for alternative, non-patriarchal social relations, relations that are not predicated on power.

Power-over is linked to domination and control and is the prevailing form of power in patriarchal societies and institutions. Relationships between human and non-human life are described by rules, laws or abstract generalisations. Power-over therefore has a clear material base which may be sustained by punitive physical, economic or social sanctions. Power-over enables one group to make decisions that effect other groups. This, coupled with the use of force, enables one group to control another. We are, in patriarchal systems, embedded in relations of power-over and indoctrinated into them as children. Inevitably power-over shapes every institution of society, including family, work, law, church and school (Starhawk, 1990).

Power-with, the form of power at the heart of Friere's (1990) concept of liberating dialogical action, is social power, where power and influence are held among equals. Indeed it can only exist among those who are equal and who recognise that they are so. Power-with is based on co-operation not competition, and conceives the world as a pattern of relationships which are constantly changing. This pattern can therefore be shaped, moulded and shifted. Power-with bridges the value systems of power-over and power-from-within.

Power-from-within refers to the agency of the subject to negotiate, and renegotiate, their subject position. It implies self-reflexivity and conscious intentional action motivated toward the unmasking of the ideological features that shape those knowledges, beliefs and practices that shape social reality,

relationship and possibility. Barrett (1981) contends that all patriarchal institutions are structured on the basis of such ideologies.

In addition, Porter (1991) distinguishes between power-over and personal power on the basis of the motives and outcomes of each. Power-over derives from a desire to control knowledge, resources, property, possessions, ideas, behaviour and people. In contrast, personal power challenges traditional notions and sources of power and 'prompts a general re-evaluation of personal capacities for creating and choosing alternatives that neither oppress others, nor are oppressive in themselves' (Porter, 1991, p.181). To evoke these capacities, this power- from-within, I argue that we must envision the conditions and actions that will enable their expression. We are challenged, therefore, to imagine and create the conditions that will foster empowerment.

Empowerment

My focus here is on the centrality of empowerment to my struggle to articulate a politics of change. Discourses of transformation, or liberation, are here located as part of those practices which 'empower those involved to change as well as understand the world' (Lather, 1991, p.3). Like Lather I am opposed to the use of the term 'empowerment' to signify 'self assertion, upward mobility and the psychological experience of feeling powerful' (1991, p.3). Such a definition does little to dislodge the hegemony and hierarchical order of patriarchal discourse.

Here empowerment is understood in terms of social or collective identity rather than simply the development of a sense of identity as an individual (Taylor, 1989). Within the context of a counter-hegemonic project I take empowerment to involve 'analysing ideas about the causes of powerlessness, recognising systemic oppressive forces, and acting both individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives' (Lather, 1991, p.3). Such a reading of empowerment signals the interrelatedness of the social and the personal and understands that empowerment is something undertaken for oneself, alone or in collaboration, and is not something done 'to' or 'for' others.

This idea of empowerment is, I believe, central to the contestation of patriarchy. Thus, empowerment implies self determination and requires an

'unlearning of powerlessness' (Porter, 1991, p.182). Those who become empowered are more able to challenge those who continue to exercise power over others. Further, I argue that empowerment enables action which is motivated by refusal to co-operate with the humiliating hierarchical structures of dominance and submission, and, in so doing 'create new structures that do not depend on hierarchy for cohesion' (Starhawk, 1990, p.10).

It must be recognised that a politics of empowerment is a struggle to change the nature of the power in which our society is rooted (Christ, 1991). I suggest that the struggle is to transform hierarchal power into relational power, a power which comes from understanding the connection of one's own power to that of others. Empowerment, as the source of possible personal/social/political change, involves a struggle to make connections which affirm and are affirmed by those actions which transform our sense of self, our sense of others, our sense of community and ultimately our sense of, and belief in, what is real.

I argue that changes in awareness or consciousness of our subject positions empower us to change our thoughts, beliefs and actions. Our thoughts, beliefs and actions shape reality and collective reality is shaped by collective action. Collective action is enabled by power shared between equals and becoming equal depends upon liberation from an oppressive reality, that of patriarchy.

Without consciously understanding history, without confronting the existing political and social power structures, there can be no significant change; nothing short of the total transformation of society will suffice. If, as Lerner (1990) asserts, patriarchy is a historic creation formed by men and women, then it can be transformed by them also, together, and not as oppositional forces in a dualistic, alienated and separated world.

The ability to imagine from a position outside the present system is the most potent option in coping with the impending termination of the male dominant world order, as well as for envisioning the forms of a new phase of human history which must follow.

(Lawlor, 1991 p.30)

The central assumption underpinning this work is that we have become habituated to particular forms of social relations which are both structural and lived out in individual subjectivities. Habituated we are unable to see what has, anyway, become invisible - that the possibilities and meanings of social relations are structured around discourses of gender and power.

This habituation is made possible, and invisible, by those discourses and discursive practices which bring ideology into material reality and are solidified in language. Poststructuralist feminist analysis of the sort I am undertaking here demands radical reflection on our interpretive frames (Lather, 1991). This raises questions about the relationship between social structure and reality as produced and reproduced through the relationship between ideology, discourse and language as sites of contest and change. In the following chapter it is this relationship between ideology, discourse and language that I intend to explore.

CHAPTER TWO: ideology, discourse and language

HER STORY

We can't talk about all that the universe contains because to do so would be to render it finite and we know in some way, that we cannot prove, that it is infinite. So what the universe doesn't contain is as significant to us as what it does. There will be a moment (though of course it won't be a moment) when we will know (though knowing will no longer be separate from being) that we are a part of all we have met and that all we have met was already a part of us.

Until now religion has described it better than science, but now physics and metaphysics appear to be saying the same thing. The world is flat and round, is it not? We have dreams of moving back and forward in time, though to use the words back and forward is to make a nonsense of the dream, for it implies that time is linear, and if that were so there could be no movement, only a forward progression. But we do not move through time, time moves through us ... Language always betrays us, tells the truth when we want to lie and dissolves into formlessness when we would most like to be precise. And so, we cannot move back and forth in time, but we can experience it in a different way. If all time is eternally present, there is no reason why we should not step out of one present into another. The inward life tells us that we are multiple not single and that our one existence is really countless existences holding hands like those cut-out paper dolls, but unlike dolls never coming to an end. When we say, 'I have been here before', perhaps we mean 'I am here now', but in another life, another time, doing something else.

Winterson, 1990, p.90

This excerpt from **Sexing the Cherry** signals the contradictory feelings produced by my desire to know and explain what may not yet, and may never, be known or explained, may perhaps never be knowable or explicable. This is not to say that nothing may ever be known or explained, but I understand that there are, currently at least, limits and that these limits are discursive. I recognise that I am only able to generate meanings from the range of discursively produced meanings available to me, from the language through which I speak/write myself and make sense of the complexity of my lived experience. I struggle, in the telling of myself, to avoid imputing a fake linearity and clear causal relations to the memories, dreams and experience that comprise my narrative. I am beginning to see how everything is relational and contextual; that I am a self-in-relation to other structures, discourses, meanings and selves, that I am a part of all that I have met and that all I have met is already a part of me. In understanding this I am seeking out a language of possibility, a language that allows contradictions, speaks of multiplicity and allows me to experience my past differently, redefine my present and imagine a possible future.

MY STORY

Peter,
sook, sissy, girlie, poof, poofter,
fag, faggot, camp, fairy, queen, nancy-boy,
pansy, queer, gay,
homo, sod, deviant, sick.

Words hurt. Words. Abstractions. Symbols. Annunciations. Pronouncements. Words are powerful. Of course its all in the delivery. I was delivered into, and up to, a world of words. A collection of abstractions, symbols and meanings. Boy. Male. Masculine. Normal. Natural. Heterosexual. Yet I failed. Am a failure. An aberration. Of nature. Of culture. My boyness, my maleness, were not precursors of my masculinity, my naturalness, my normality or my heterosexuality. Instructed in the language of the Fathers I learned that I was effeminate. Feminised. Unnatural. Bad. Deviant. Wrong. Criminal. Sinner. Powerless. Other, weak, passive. Feminised and powerless. I took up these labels and attached them to myself with a careful, steady hand, lining up the edges, making sure the corners stuck. I was, after all, a good boy. Compliant, obedient, agreeable co-operative. I did as I was bid. I did not question the accuracy of these labels, the arbitrariness of their meanings. I did not need to. They were inked with truth. And I took them to be so. True. They were reflections of a real world, a natural order. My world was ordered. Explicable. Once. Its order was disturbed by an intrusion of memory. An intrusion I struggle to make sense of, but don't have the words for. The words I have are inadequate, partial and barely enough to sketch a rudimentary outline of this intrusion that has so disrupted me, body and mind. There are gaps, omissions. Still. And I don't have the language to fill them. All I know is that time does not stand still. We move through it and it through us. Slowly, slowly, I begin to question my inscription. To see its meanings as illusory. Illusions solidified as reality. A fossilisation of possibility. A point of reference. A formulation of the status quo. A means of establishing order and control. Words are not neutral or harmless. No. They manipulate reality. They are values solidified, relations of power given material force. They tell me who I am, who I can be, and who I cannot. What is possible and what is not. But words are lies, and lies are words. These lying words are nothing more than configurations of scratchy

graphemes and empty phonemes. A slack-hinged door squeaking in a hollow wind. As for me? I am searching, like some obsessive lexicographer, for new words, new definitions, new meanings and a voice with which to articulate them and the stories of possibility they foretell.

I have come to understand that, growing up I was taught, and learned, to make sense of the world and order it according to pre-given categories and meanings. These categories and meanings were conveyed to me through language, a language purporting to describe what already existed and merely awaited description. I have come to understand that people, objects, events and experiences become knowable, and known, by their names. This process of naming ascribes particular, fixed, meanings to particular, assumedly fixed, people, objects, events and experiences. This creates an illusion of solidity where none necessarily exists; but the illusion persists.

I accepted the names I was given and the terms by which my world was ordered; father, son, home, safe. My sense of self, my possibility and my familial and social status were constructed within the terrain of intelligible sets of meanings which conferred, and confirmed, powerlessness both in terms of my physical body and in terms of my ability to act as an agent of change. Trapped within a language of opposites I negotiated a self that eschewed all that masculinity implied, strength, power, control and violence, and inscribed myself in opposite terms, weakness, powerlessness, submission and passivity. This felt right and informed my construction of reality. Yet, ironically, this construction foreclosed the range of possibility I was able to perceive or pursue. Thus the place I took up in the world was simultaneously enabled and limited by the names and meanings available to me.

Yet these names and meanings betrayed me, my possibilities, as did those whose actions were justified by the names and meanings available to them. I was made vulnerable when I could have been safe, powerless when I could have been empowered and victim or dupe when I could have been more free. In struggling now to interrogate and reconceptualise the terms of my inscription I am also interrogating the construction and closure of possibility within the social domain of ideology, discourse and language. I understand that my own inscription is only possible within this domain, and that what is possible within this domain is circumscribed by relations of power.

Thus, my sense of betrayal by ideology, discourse and language is simultaneously personal and social. My male body has been conferred with sets of hegemonic meanings that I have not always taken up. This has been interpreted as failure, as manifestation of an otherness that marks me as different, deviant, and vulnerable to those institutions of power which privilege certain configurations of values, morals, codes and laws. I conceptualise this as betrayal by a language that constructs the self as autonomous, natural and individual, not socially produced, regulated,

rewarded and punished. Where this language of conformity pathologises those individual experiences or actions which fall outside the range of culturally endorsed meanings and practices, then the possibilities for change are foreclosed. In this way change is conceptualised in terms of individual adaption rather than in terms of social or political transformation, and this amounts to a betrayal of possibility. As with all betrayals this means that the power of the powerful remains intact.

I am attempting, in the discussion that follows, to foreground the relations of power through which ideologies, discourses and languages are socially produced and reproduced and through which subjectivities are constructed. In so doing I am attempting to clear a space in which to articulate a language of possibility.

OUR STORY

Purpose

I have a name, and am variously named by others who assume that the names I am known by have a meaning which fixes my identity, makes me knowable. In struggling to understand the possibilities for reinscribing myself I recognise that I am struggling also to understand how I have come to be named and how that process of naming may be transfigured. Thus I am struggling, in this chapter, to come to some understanding of the discursive production of myself as speaking/writing subject. This struggle is undertaken in the territory made available to me by poststructuralist feminist theory. What I am attempting here is the mapping of relations between ideology, discourse and language and connecting these to some understanding of how the real, the symbolic and the imaginary might function in relation to subjectivity, structure and agency. This mapping informs the framework within which the subjects of this text, including myself, are interrogated.

Ideology is understood as referring to sets of meanings, beliefs and values; discourses and discursive practices are understood as the medium through which ideology is brought into material effect; and language is understood as the medium through which these meanings are solidified and circulated (Barrett, 1991; Belsey, 1991; Davies, 1993; Fairclough, 1993; Weedon, 1991).

What is at issue is the production and reproduction of sets of meanings which congeal into categories and come to be seen as fixed, static, absolute, true, natural and real. These meanings inform those discourses which circulate in particular historical/political/social contexts and attain hegemony over meaning making in the form of common sense, universal truths or self evident facts. From a poststructuralist feminist perspective, what I am attempting is

a way of conceptualising the relationship between language, social institutions and individual consciousness which focuses on how power is exercised and on the possibilities of change.

(Weedon, 1991, p.19)

Like Weedon (1991) I argue that social meanings are produced within social institutions and practices and that individual subjects are simultaneously shaped by these institutions and able to act as agents of

change. This change may either serve hegemonic interests or challenge existing power relations. As Connell (1995) suggests, hegemony does not mean total control; 'it is not automatic, and may be disrupted - or even disrupt itself' (Connell, 1995, p.37). In considering some of the ways in which individual subjects come to understand the material conditions of their lived experience, of their everyday lives, everyday spaces are identified as sites of struggle where they can either be reproduced or transformed.

In producing this self-reflexive text I am engaged in the project of searching for different possibilities for making sense of lived experience, for ways of being and knowing that 'do justice to the complexity, tenuity, and indeterminacy of most of human experience' (Lather, 1991, p.52). I am attempting also to make connections between lived experience and the intersubjective construction of meaning.

By acting as my own informant, I can hope to achieve two things. First, to theorise about the self from a firm grounding in the subjective: to map the contemporary subject from an initial knowledge of myself. Second, to lay the foundation for an intuitive interpretation of the selves of others. If I am conscious of the way I live through discourses, stereotyped and other, how I switch, combine and juxtapose interpretations, identities and selves in securing a home for myself in the contemporary world, then I can construe how others might be doing likewise.

(Rapport, 1995, p.269)

In producing this self-reflexive text I am also struggling to understand myself as 'historically contingent, as formed within discourses and power relations' (Lather, 1991, p.10). I am struggling to articulate a subject that is formed within multiple structures and discourses, within many sites and institutions; a subject that is open, multiple and fractured, understood to be part of the social relations of language despite any illusion of finality, closure, independence, autonomy, individuality or universality (Lather, 1991; Pile & Thrift, 1995).

As speaking/writing subject I understand that I am only able to speak or write from within the discourses available to me. I refer to these discourses, whether spoken or written, as texts. Thus discourses allow for the textual staging of meaning and knowledge, and I am produced in the social texts that I take up as my own and reproduce in the process of configuring or fabricating a fictive, imaginary, but always embodied self. In this sense I am a derivative text, borrowed from other voices and texts, and in speaking/writing I want to use these many voices and other texts to foreground the intertextual, intersubjective discursive construction of meaning and subjectivity.

Within postmodern textual practice, 'the fiction of the creating subject gives way to frank quotation, excerption, accumulation and repetition of already existing images'. (Hutcheon, 1988a, p.11) ... This de-centering of the author via intertextuality is a demonstration of how the author is inevitably inscribed in discourses created by others, preceded and surrounded by other texts, some of which are evoked, some not.

(Lather, 1991, p.9)

What I seek in this exploration of ideology, discourse and language is to expose that which appears as natural to be an effect. Thus, what might be taken as natural is understood as the material effect or embodiment of meanings that are more to do with relations of power than true expressions or representations of the real. Given this understanding I argue that subjects are produced within discursive practices and am critical of universalist models of development which generate meanings about 'the person', 'female', 'femininity', 'male', or 'masculinity' outside 'specific historically and culturally located practices in which subject positions are produced through the interchange of signs' (Walkerdine, 1995, p.312). Thus I am preoccupied with the relationship of the subject, in terms of how subjectivity is lived, to both the historical and the material, and with how a non-unitary subjectivity might be held together in the illusion of a singular embodied subject.

I argue that we make sense of the world through the stories that we tell ourselves, and that these stories are discursive constructions which are historically, politically and socially located in relations of power. In exploring the processes of subjectification I am attempting to make this construction 'politically, epistemologically and aesthetically visible' (Kieth, 1995, p.356). This is a political struggle, located in the space of the everyday, the territory where socio-political discourses and practices are realised and gendered subjectivities produced and reproduced.

The practices in which subjects are produced are both material and discursive, but the relation is not one of representation but signification. Indeed if fictions can function in truth then fictions can have real effects. Subjects are created in multiple positionings in material and discursive practices, in specific historical conditions in which certain apparatuses of social regulation become techniques of self-reproduction. These are imbued with fantasy. We cannot therefore separate ... the fictions and fantasies in which life is produced and read.

(Walkerdine, 1995, p.325)

Ideology

Like Lather (1991) I understand ideology to be the medium through which consciousness and meaningfulness operate in everyday life. Ideologies are the stories a culture tells about itself, and I position these stories as persuasive fictions which have material effects and hence come to be understood as fact. Thus ideology, far from being disembodied ideas, occurs in material forms and has material effects. Ideology works through constituting persons as social subjects, simultaneously fixing them in subject positions and creating the illusion that they are free, self-determining agents (Fairclough, 1993, p.30).

Whereas an individual's subjectivity may appear natural to them it is, rather, an effect of ideology. Ideology constitutes subjectivity in and through language, and this constitution of subjects and available subject positions is a feature of all ideology (Weedon, 1991). In poststructuralist feminist theory ideology mediates between individual subjects and their lived experience and the relationship between individual subjects and the subject positions they take up in a specific ideology is imaginary, fictive and produced, not given. This assumes that ideology 'is always the precondition of social existence which takes place through historically specific ideologies' (Weedon, 1991, p.31). Meanings are thus constructed and generated within an ideological

structure or system which itself generates particular historically, politically and socially located ideologies. For example, until the mid 1970's homosexuality was defined as a psycho-pathological condition. Located as an illness within discourses of psychiatry it was a condition that was assumed to be curable. Such definition and location justified the use of lobotomies and convulsive shock therapy to return the homosexual patient to a position of normalised heterosexuality (Spencer, 1995). Further, such definition and location both informed and justified the social and legal position of homosexual men as aberrant, immoral and illegal.

I am interested in the generation and circulation of meanings relating to sex, gender and sexuality and the ways in which these meanings are taken up, refused or transformed by particular subjects in particular contexts. Through the inclusion and interrogation of autobiographical stories I position myself as one of these particular subjects, located in a particular context. Having located this text in the context of patriarchy, meanings about sex, gender and sexuality are situated in relations of power. Thus I understand that ideologies function as significations or constructions of reality, incorporating the physical world, social relations and social identities, which are built into various dimensions of the forms and meanings of discursive practices, and which contribute to the production, reproduction or transformation of relations of domination (Fairclough, 1993; Lather, 1991; Weedon, 1991).

Patriarchy, conceived as ideology, as 'a lived system of meanings and values' (Ruthven, 1990, p.35) is experienced in the form of hegemony that is both constitutive and constituting. Experienced as social practices these hegemonic meanings and values constitute our sense of reality. Ideology, 'that never fully articulated system of assumptions by which a society operates, and which permeates everything it produces' (Ruthven, 1990, p.31) is manifest in the ways we represent ourselves and are represented to one another. In this way ideology functions to justify the status quo and persuade the powerless that their powerlessness is inevitable (Miller, 1986; Friere, 1990; Ruthven, 1990). Acts of compliance, complicity and collusion maintain those social structures and practices which determine who holds power and who does not. Where these structures and practices come to be naturalised they become invisible and understood as inevitable. In my own historical/political/social context it has been difficult to experience my homosexuality as anything other than disempowering, and I have come to accept this as inevitable within a patriarchal gender order. Institutionalised, and in some cases legally sanctioned, homophobia has been informed by ideologies which assume a

natural, biologically necessary, god-given heterosexual reproductive order within which homosexuality is located as unnatural and hence both immoral and illegal. Thus located, the subject position 'homosexual' has been marginalised and rendered less powerful than the hegemonic heterosexual model from which it is seen to deviate. The ideologically situated meanings and values associated with particular subject positions, in this case 'homosexual', correlate to the amount of social power those positions accrue.

Culture is concerned with meanings and pleasures: our culture consists of the meanings we make of our social experience and of our social relations, and therefore the sense we have of 'selves'. It also situates those meanings within the social system, for a social system can only be held in place by the meanings that people make of it. Culture is deeply inscribed in the differential distribution of power within a society, for power relations can only be stabilised or destabilised by the meanings that people make of them. Culture is a struggle for meanings as society is a struggle for power.

(Fiske, 1987, p.20)

I recognise that the ideologies embedded in discursive practices are most effective when they become naturalised, and achieve the status of self evident or common sense truths. Yet I recognise also that this stable and established property of ideologies should not be overstated. My interest in the possibilities for personal and social transformation identifies ideological struggle as a dimension of discursive practice. Such a struggle aims to reshape discursive practices and the ideologies which inform them by contesting, restructuring or transforming relations of domination.

As both the medium and the outcome of lived experience ideology functions not only to limit human action but also to enable it ... Central to understanding how ideology functions in the interest of social reproduction is the issue of how ideology works on and through individuals to secure their basic consent to the basic ethos and practices of the dominant society. Equally important for an understanding of how ideology functions in the interest of social transformation is the issue of how ideology creates the terrain for self-reflection and transformative action.

(Giroux, 1984, p.314)

I want here to reiterate Lather's (1991) argument that ideology is the medium through which consciousness and meaningfulness operate in everyday life. Patriarchal ideologies reflect social structures, values, beliefs and practices, all of which are constructed in terms of oppositional hierarchical dualisms of which the terms 'male' and 'female' are the primary pair. In this way ideology is understood to be gendered, and given the

proposed relationship between ideology and consciousness 'then our consciousness is gendered' (Lather, 1991, p.2). Gendered ideologies and ideologies of gender, as stories, circumscribe the boundaries of our fictive realities. Given the centrality of sex, gender, sexuality and consciousness to the construction of subjectivity and reality, then a consciousness of gender and the difference gender makes is critical to any transformation of our gendered consciousness. This in turn, is critical to any transformation of our reality and the social conditions which prevail within it. The issue of consciousness will be taken up elsewhere in this text, especially in terms of the kind of self-reflexive, transformative consciousness proposed by Friere (1990), Giroux (1984), Lather (1991) and Rinehart (1992).

Discourse

The term discourse emphasises the ideological nature of language use, and in using the term discourse, I am foregrounding language use as a dimension of social practice, rather than a purely individual activity. Thus discourse is understood as a mode of action through which people may act on the world and on each other. It also implies that there is a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure (Fairclough, 1993, p.64).

How we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects, and how we give meanings to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our everyday lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interests they represent (Weedon, 1991, p.26).

In poststructuralist feminist theory both the structure and the function of the subject within discourse are preconditions for the availability of historically specific subject positions within particular discourses, discursive contexts and practices (Weedon, 1991). Both discourses and ideologies are seen as operating in a dynamic ideological field, where ideologies do not operate through single ideas but rather 'through discursive chains, in clusters, in semantic fields, in discursive formations' (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.8).

These chains, clusters, fields and formations coalesce in the production and reproduction of seemingly coherent, consistent and compelling meanings. Here I am using the term discourse to map relations between ideology, language and social relations.

Like Fairclough (1993) I recognise that in attempting to avoid the pitfalls of over emphasising either the social determination of discourse or the construction of the social in discourse, it is important that the relationship between discourse and social structure be seen dialectically. Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning.

I am interested in reflecting upon the ways in which discourse 'contributes to the construction of what are variously referred to as 'social identities' and 'subject positions' for social 'subjects' and types of 'self' ' (Fairclough, 1993, p.65) as well as the ways in which discourse helps to construct social relationships in terms of gender and power.

I thus consider discourse in relation to ideology and power, and place discourse within a view of power as hegemony, and view the evolution of power relations as hegemonic struggle. It is discourse as a mode of social, political and ideological practice that is the focus of my discussion.

Discourse as practice

Discourse as a political practice establishes, sustains and changes power relations, and the collective entities (classes, blocs, communities, groups) between which power relations obtain. Discourse as an ideological practice constitutes, naturalises, sustains and changes significations of the world from diverse positions in power relations.

(Fairclough, 1993, p.67)

The power relations I am here foregrounding are those to do with gender and the classes, blocs, communities and groups I am especially focussing on are women and men. Thus I focus on the ways in which the construction of gendered subjectivities is made possible through sets of discursive practices which are understood, within patriarchy and patriarchal ideology, as always being about relations of power. I am also foregrounding the material effects of discourses and discursive practices on the body, both social and individual.

In understanding discourses as identifiable, interrelated sets of practices and institutions it is possible to conceive of subjectivity as constituted by the practices through which it is described and through which it is created and lived, animated and experienced. Given this context I understand that 'words such as body and self seem to describe things, but in

fact disguise their constitution by those very words' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.4). The subject, understood in terms of both structure and agency, is located within various power laden discursive positions within which the body or self is not positioned as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed. Further the subject is understood as neither a fixed thing, nor a free-floating set of attributes.

In poststructuralist theory the focus is on the way each person actively takes up the discourses through which they and others speak/write the world into existence *as if they were their own*. Through those discourses they are made speaking subjects at the same time as they are subjected to the constitutive force of those discourses.

(Davies, 1993, p.13)

Thus the poststructuralist use of the term discourse signals an understanding of the person as made subject through the discourses made available to, and taken up by, them.

Discourses about gender make particular subject positions available in culture. Gendered discourses assume natural relations between biology and society, bodies and identities, gender and power, and conflate the terms man/male/masculine and woman/female/feminine as coherent reflections of the real rather than as discursive productions. For Butler (1990) gender is 'the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 1990, p.33). Subject positions are thus 'reproduced both through discursive practices and through power-laden regulatory practices' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.5). I conform to my social inscription as male in the way I clothe myself, always in trousers, never dresses. I consciously alter my behaviour to appear more masculine when I perceive threat of homophobic abuse from other men. Yet paradoxically, something about my curls, my earrings, my body language, signals my lack of masculinity, my homosexuality, and these things, and more, are conscious choices or affectations meant to signal my difference. As much as I conform to the category 'male' I resist conformity to the categories 'masculine' and 'heterosexual' and understand that the positions I take up are discursive constructions which imply different relations of power in different contexts.

Discourses then, are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body and the unconscious and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (Weedon, 1991, p.108). Thus, bodies, thoughts and feelings have no meaning beyond their discursive articulation. This text then, is a discursive articulation of its author's

subjectivity, or more precisely, of the extent to which this subjectivity is understood by its author. This understanding is necessarily limited by the discursive contexts within which it is apprehended and articulated. In presenting this text as a series of multiple, fragmented polyvocal narratives I seek to constantly foreground the constructed nature of text, author and reader, and seek also to foreground the intersection of the personal and the theoretical and the extent to which all acts of thinking, reading, talking and writing are discursive practices located within the limitations of the discourses through which they are simultaneously made possible and rendered invisible.

The constitutive effects of discourse

Generally discourses and their attendant storylines are taken up as one's own in a way that is not visible, since discourse is understood as the transparent medium through which we see real worlds.

(Davies, 1993, p.153)

Drawing on the work of Foucault, Barrett theorises the relationship between knowledge, discourse, truth and power (Barrett, 1991, p.vii). Relations of truth and power are understood as 'constitutive of hegemony' (Barrett, 1991, p.141) within which 'consciousness largely functions through symbolic language codes' (Barrett, 1991, p.30). Barrett argues that although discourses are composed of signs they do more than designate things; 'they systematically form the objects about which they speak' (Barrett, 1991, p.130). Thus discourses do not describe an already there and otherwise silent reality. Rather they define the ordering of objects. This process of ordering involves the organisation of experience and knowledge according to the categories, hierarchies, meanings and truths privileged by given discourses. Discourses operate through sets of rules which, having established limits, define and recognise propositions as either true or false. This process of validation, and the discourses which makes it possible, give rise to what Foucault refers to as a 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980). This regime endorses some propositions and knowledges and suppresses those which threaten its boundaries. A regime of truth is language and metaphor 'hardened into a kind of reality' (Grosz & de Lepervarche, 1988, p.21). This sedimentation and solidification of reality also involves the construction of fossilised and seemingly impenetrable boundaries. These boundaries determine the limits of reality and existence and thus determine the parameters of the territory on

which gendered subjectivity is mapped. For Bartky (1990) subjectivity is constructed

through a continuous process of personal engagement in the discourses, institutions and practices that construct meaning and ascribe value to the lived experience of the subject and the world-view or reality constructed by them.

(Bartky, 1990, p.113)

Within the context of patriarchy these discourses, institutions and practices are described as phallogentric, and phallogentrism is understood to circumscribe all dominant Western ways of thinking, talking about and making our world (Threadgold, 1990). For Threadgold phallogentrism is a

discursive and representational construction of that world in binary terms such as that one term is always regarded as the norm and highly valorised, while the other is defined only ever in relation to it and devalorised.

(Threadgold, 1990, p.1)

Thus, phallogentric discourses and representations are founded on binary oppositions, and these oppositions shape the kinds of worlds and knowledges we construct. Further, these constructed worlds and knowledges support and maintain patriarchal institutions and practices where that which is associated with the male attains hegemony, manifest as power and privilege, over that which is associated with the not male, the other, the female (Threadgold, 1990, p.23).

Grosz' (1990) analysis of the cultural inscription of sexed bodies explores and questions prevailing categories of sexual polarisation. This analysis recognises that subjectivity is both circumscribed by and mapped in the territory between polarities, and represented in terms of oppositional hierarchical dualisms. Given the relationship between language, knowledge, consciousness, power, reality, subjectivity and the discourses through which they are constructed, these too are circumscribed by polarities, by hierarchical binary categories of thinking and being.

Discourses contribute to the construction of systems of knowledge and belief and are not simply ideas, they are also practices, ways of producing knowledge and ways of shaping the world according to that knowledge. Further, discourses can only be understood in relation to other discourses (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992, p.237). Subjects are therefore not seen as fixed but rather understood as being constantly in process, as being constituted

and reconstituted through the discursive practices to which they have access in their daily lives (Davies, 1993, p.11).

Lived experience, daily lives and everyday spaces are ideological, discursive linguistic constructions produced and reproduced in variable historical, political and social contexts. Like Fairclough (1993) I recognise that patriarchal society is characterised by relations of domination on the basis of class, gender, race, and so on, and that in so far as human beings are capable of transcending such societies, they are capable of transcending ideology (Fairclough, 1993, p.91). Thus whilst ideology and discourse are sites in which social subjects are produced and reproduced they are also sites in which subjects may contest the terms of their subjectification, and in contesting and transforming ideologies and discourses, transform both themselves and their society.

The individual subject is understood at one and the same time to be constituted through social structures and through language, and becoming a speaking subject, one who can continue to speak/write into existence those same structures and those same discourses. But, as speaking subject, they can also invent and break old structures and patterns and discourses and thus speak/write into existence other ways of being.

(Davies, 1993, p.xviii)

Thus, poststructuralist feminist theory foregrounds the ways in which language situates, limits, shapes or makes possible one kind of a world or another (Davies, 1993, p.xviii).

Language

Like all theories, poststructuralism makes certain assumptions about language, subjectivity, knowledge and truth. Its founding insight ... is that language, far from reflecting an already given social reality, constitutes social reality for us. Neither social reality nor the 'natural' world has fixed intrinsic meanings which language reflects or expresses. Different languages and different discourses within the same language divide up the world and give it meaning in different ways which cannot be reduced to one another through translation or by an appeal to universally shared concepts reflecting a fixed reality.

(Weedon, 1991, p.22)

Within poststructuralist theory, language is central to the analysis of social organisation, social meanings, and issues of power and consciousness. Language is the site where both actual and possible forms of social organisation are articulated and where they may be contested. Language is

also the site in which subjectivity is constructed (Weedon, 1991). Language is not taken to be an expression of a unique individuality, but rather understood as the site in which historically/politically/socially specific subjectivities are constructed. Subjectivities and meanings are understood as produced within language rather than reflected by it. Thus, language is 'truly social and a site of political struggle' (Weedon, 1991, p.23). Language, as a way of constituting social reality, makes available certain discursive positions for social and individual consumption and performance. These positions include discourses relating to sex, gender and sexuality. The lived experience of the subject is then a linguistic construct within which subject positions are taken up and performed (Belsey, 1991; Butler, 1990; Davies, 1989, 1993, 1994).

Subjectivity, knowledge and reality are thus positioned as discursive/linguistic constructions. They are constituted through the discourses with which we 'speak and write ourselves into existence' (Davies, 1993, p.1). These discourses occur within, and are articulated through, language, and it is through this language that they are ascribed meaning and a substantive social status as true. It is also through language that discourses solidify as lived relations of power.

In this way the language through which we experience and articulate our realities embodies attitudes and beliefs about power, knowledge and values. 'Reality is conceived and named through language', (Segal 1991, p.xii) and it is through language that we are able to map our reality, or accept the reality that has been mapped for us. Language, as 'delimitation, a strategic limitation of possible meanings' (Lather, 1991, p.xix) is thus the terrain where differently privileged discourses struggle for hegemony through confrontation, contestation and displacement.

Language, reality and meaning

Threadgold (1990) recognises that meanings are made by speaking subjects and that this happens in ways that contribute to the social production of consciousness and self-consciousness, and of commonsense ways of knowing, believing and experiencing (Threadgold, 1990, p.5). Thus, in the process of making meanings, those meanings come to be taken as real, as constituting reality. Language, as part of this process, mediates the construction of bodies, knowledge and consensual reality. If, as Threadgold

(1990) asserts, the world is constructed through discourse, meaning and representation, then the people living in that world will be similarly constructed.

Since reality 'has no meaning except in language' (Weedon 1991, p.34) then language does not simply reflect an already given social reality. Rather, language constitutes social reality. Thus, language is central to the analysis of social organisation, social meanings, power and individual consciousness. It is also through language that our subjectivity, our sense of ourselves, is constructed. Subjectivity, then, is not innate or genetically determined, but constructed through social practices and language, where privileged meanings are mediated by power.

Language in the form of an historically specific range of ways of giving meaning to social reality, offers us various discursive positions, including models of femininity and masculinity, through which we consciously live our lives.

(Weedon, 1991, p.25)

In drawing on poststructuralist feminist theory I am foregrounding the power of language to organise both thought and experience. Language is understood as the medium through which epistemological codes are generated, and since meaning is generated in terms of pre-established categories the ways we speak and write influence our conceptual boundaries and create areas of silence (Lather, 1991). As we acquire language and articulate the meanings we make of our experience, we draw on particular ways of thinking and particular discourses 'which pre-date our entry into language' (Weedon, 1991, p.33). Therefore these ways of thinking, or categories of thought, pre-exist us and are structured in particular historical, political and social contexts from which they derive meaning. These categories and the ways of thinking inherent in them, constitute our consciousness and the frameworks and boundaries upon which we construct our sense of ourselves. Yet, as Weedon (1991) acknowledges, language is not monolithic; 'Dominant meanings can be contested, alternative meanings affirmed' (Weedon, 1991, p.76). There has been a move among some gay and lesbian activists to politicise the meanings of 'queer' and 'dyke' and reclaim them from a pejorative heterosexual lexicon. In so doing they have contested previously dominant meanings and reinscribed them as affirmations of difference, pride and solidarity.

In assuming that language is not a neutral descriptive tool poststructuralist feminist theory analyses the material and political affects of language. In contesting prevailing phallogentric knowledges it also analyses the ways in which the language available constrains that which can be said. Poststructuralist feminist theory thus foregrounds the possibilities for

creating new modes of expression, new discursive styles, new enunciative positions to experiment with a language that ... avoids the strategic deafness hitherto common in male paradigms.

(Grosz, 1988, p.100)

Whereas the knowing subject of the phallogentric paradigm is disembodied, non-historical and non-social, poststructuralist feminist theory, rather than seeing subject and object, knower and known as separate, recognises their continuity and interrelatedness. Knowledge is thus produced in the relationship between subject and object. Consequently, different subjects of knowledge may produce different forms of knowledge and this knowledge is constructed and articulated through discourses which are produced from sexually coded positions (Grosz, 1988; Weedon, 1991).

I situate this text as, among many things, a response to the epistemological move, or paradigm shift from a found world, a world out there waiting to be discovered, to a constructed world (Appleyard, 1993; Bohm & Peat, 1987; Capra, 1983; Davies, 1982; Lather, 1991). Like Lather I understand this historical moment to be 'a time of openness and questioning of established paradigms in intellectual thought' (Lather, 1991, p.7). This emphasis on constructed worlds implies similarly constructed subjectivities, knowledges and realities, each made possible through the discursive constructions, frames of reference and languages through which they are given meaning and voice. Yet 'it is the misfortune (but perhaps also the voluptuous pleasure) of language not be able to authenticate itself' (Barthes, 1993, p.85). Language is thus, 'by nature fictional' and reality 'never anything but a contingency' (Barthes, 1993, p.87). I argue that discourses and ideologies are similarly fictitious and that every fiction is supported by

a social jargon, a sociolect, with which it identifies. Fiction is that degree of consistency a language attains when it has jelled exceptionally and finds a sacerdotal class (priests, intellectuals, artists) to speak it generally and to circulate it.

(Barthes, 1994, p.27)

Each language, each jargon, each ideology or discourse, each fiction, struggles for hegemony, and where it triumphs, where it achieves the power that hegemony accords, it becomes naturalised, generalised, commonsensical, and ascribed the quality of truth.

Hegemony, truth and the stereotype

The stereotype is the word repeated without any magic, any enthusiasm, as though it were natural, as though by some miracle this recurring word were adequate on each occasion for different reasons, as though to imitate could no longer be sensed as an imitation: an unconstrained word that claims consistency and is unaware of its own insistence ... 'truth' is only the solidification of old metaphors.

(Barthes, 1994, p.42)

Like Rose (1995) I recognise that patriarchal/phallogocentric ideologies and discourses establish their hegemony and regulate identity through the circulation of stereotypes (Rose, 1995, p.353). It is through making these stereotypes visible, and fracturing or disrupting their proliferation in everyday space, that patriarchal ideologies and discourses may be unmasked and disrupted. Thus stereotyped, cliched, sloganish and proverbial discursive usage is foregrounded, and foregrounded as fictional. Such discourses are understood to predominate and proliferate in individual speech, thought, emotion, volition and action and form the limits within which social interactions and meanings are made possible and intelligible. Language then is understood as 'more formulaic, automatic and rehearsed, rather than propositional, creative or freely generated' (Fillmore, 1976, p.9). Derogatory synonyms of the sort foregrounded in the story at the beginning of this chapter, and which are characteristic of homophobic verbal abuse, are drawn from a pool of cliches, stereotypes and slogans which inform meanings and assumptions about sex, gender and sexuality.

What I am foregrounding here is the relationship between the discursive/linguistic conventions of stereotyping and the construction of gendered subjectivities. I recognise that images which both represent and constitute sexual difference proliferate in everyday space. Ideologies and stereotypes function in this space to present the position of the subject as fixed and unchangeable, 'an element in a given system of differences which is human nature and the world of human experience and to show possible action as an endless repetition of 'normal' familiar action' (Belsey, 1991, p.90).

Stereotypes simultaneously circulate freely and remain fixed in order to produce hegemonised social subjects. Both masculinity and femininity are thus understood as performances whose meaning is derived from these fixed but freely circulating stereotypes. These performances are located in everyday spaces for everyday audiences who come to expect certain displays and reject others (Rose, 1995). Performer, performance and audience are constituted and reconstituted through the sociocultural practices, discourses and institutions devoted to the production of gendered subjects as either male or female, man or woman, masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual. These sexed, gendered, sexualised performances, as endless repetitions of stylised acts, become little more than 'caricatures of reality' (Ornstein & Ehrlich, 1991, p.196)

It is in stereotypes that feelings of identity may be seen to inhere, for through the positioning of stereotypical images of difference, individuals and groups can maintain their senses of belonging ... In stereotypical hyperbole, in short, differences between self and other can be more clear cut.

(Rapport, 1995, p.279)

Stereotypes thus function in ways which enable subjects to anticipate, explore and manage the unfamiliar, unknown and potentially chaotic, in terms of the personally orderly and known. Stereotypes simultaneously perform social and personal purposes; the maintenance of beliefs in normative stereotypes locates and maintains social subjects in socially designated positions in terms of sex, gender, sexuality, class, socio-economic status, race and so on. The individual subject may thus use stereotypes for cognitively mapping and anchoring themselves 'within a conventional and secure social landscape' (Rapport, 1995, p.279). I understand that it is in this way that my naming as white, male, homosexual, student, son, brother and so on is made possible and meaningful, independent of any intention on my part, or knowledge of me on the part of another.

In this way stereotypes constitute a stable freely circulating social currency and provide significant points of reference from which meanings may be constructed. They locate the subject in a position from which they are able to anticipate action, plot and interpret social relations, initiate knowing and generate knowledge; 'indeed, the simpler and more ambiguous the stereotype the more situations in which it can be used' (Rapport, 1995, p.280).

Rapport recognises that whilst each stereotype alone may represent a corruption of possible variety or occurrence, as a set they provide more

inclusive and varied representations of social reality. However fictitious or remote these public labels may be from the lived experience and private attributes of other subjects, together they constitute a coherent and predictable social world.

To stereotype is to partake of a cultural discourse ... To stereotype, in short, is to evince enculturation into a set of regularly used and possibly widely shared practices.

(Rapport, 1995, p.280)

Thus I argue that both subjects and the stereotypes through which their subjectivity is established are discursive constructions. I argue too that since these constructions are mobile, fluid and variable they are open to the possibility of re/production and transformation.

Construction, deconstruction and transformation

Above all else I am attempting, in producing this text, to reflect on the terms of my own subjectification, on how my sense of myself might have been, and continue to be, constructed. In so doing I am exploring the ways in which this self-reflexivity allows me to critically reflect on the terms of this construction that I may be empowered to make different strategic choices and reconstruct or transform my sense of myself as an embodied subject.

Fundamental to the deconstruction of the written and lived texts that constitute a sexist world is the ability to imaginatively create alternatives, to imaginatively know ways of being which might replace the existing ones.

(Davies, 1993, p.174)

I recognise there are different understandings of what deconstruction might both mean and imply, and my use of the term is specific to my purposes in producing this text. I want to foreground the constructed nature of the text, be explicit about the meanings I am constructing and critically reflect on the means of this production in terms of the meanings available to me and the ways in which they are situated in the discourses through which I construct my sense of myself as a knowing embodied subject.

This self-reflexive deconstructivist text represents my attempt to create stories that disclose their constructed nature and 'bring the teller of the tale

back into the narrative, embodied, desiring, invested in a variety of often contradictory privileges and struggles' (Lather, 1991, p.129).

My use of the term deconstruction is intended to signal the lack of innocence in any discourse by identifying the constitutive effects of our uses of language and the discursive and textual staging of knowledge (Lather, 1991). My reference to deconstruction also signals my desire to keep the making of meaning and the construction of knowledges and subjectivities in constant process; to disrupt them, keep them in play and articulate the possibility of continuously demystifying the realities we create, of resisting the tendency of our conceptual categories to conceal. Deconstruction 'provides a corrective moment, a safeguard against dogmatism, a continual displacement' (Lather, 1991, p.13). Thus deconstruction informs my desire to disrupt the familiar.

Deconstruction 'carries us from identity to multiplicity, from position to potential, from Being to Becoming ... from constants to variables' (Doel, 1995, p.233). My understanding and use of the term deconstruction foregrounds Doel's emphasis on affirmation, movement and responsibility (Doel, 1995). These features are brought into stark contrast with a view of deconstruction as negative, static and irresponsible. Whilst deconstruction does emphasise multiplicity and deferral it does not, in my view, remain neutral, impassive or indifferent to the complexities of the lived experience of the subject within particular historical/political/social contexts. Rather, deconstruction 'intervenes along lines of force, desire and power in order to lever open, dislocate and displace forced stabilisations into an Open multiplicity' (Doel, 1995, p.233).

Deconstruction, as a critical practice, critiques humanist discourse and its conceptions of subjectivity and language. In rejecting unitary intentional subjectivity it locates meaning in texts, written and lived, and their relation with other texts. I find the strategic possibilities of deconstruction liberating in that they provide a means of decentering both the hierarchical oppositions which underpin the construction of gendered subjectivities and the relations of power within which they are ascribed meaning in particular contexts (Weedon, 1991). Deconstruction, as critique

must settle, but settle contingently, make arbitrary closures, endorse strategic essentialism, make provisional gestures in order that the questions 'Whose truth? Whose nature? Whose version of reason? Whose history? Whose tradition?' may be asked.

(Bordo, 1990, p.137)

Deconstruction as a politics of possibility

Deconstruction is a means of disrupting understandings of reality by revealing alternative meanings. New meanings admit new possibilities for thought and action and may thus foster change. Thus deconstruction offers a means for examining the ways in which language operates 'outside our everyday awareness to create meaning' (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1991, p.46)

Deconstruction, or putting a word or concept under erasure, is a political act. It reveals the generally invisible but repressive politics of any particular form of representation.

(Davies, 1993:8)

Deconstruction provides a means through which old realities, taken for granted meanings and common sense understandings may be unravelled, contested, recreated and invested with new meanings. Deconstruction agitates 'on behalf of the exuberance of life against a too avid fixing and freezing of things (Cocks, 1989, p.222).

There is no single 'truth' only different constructions, different representations, some of which are read as 'fact', some as 'fiction' depending on the way they are functionally contextualised, and by whom and in whose interests.

(Threadgold, 1990, p.3)

My emphasis on deconstruction as a means of unmasking, understanding and transforming relations of power, hegemonic meanings, knowledges and truths, and the discursive production and reproduction of subjectivity, forms the basis of my struggle to articulate possibilities for empowerment, liberation and both personal and social transformation. Such a struggle locates this text in the discursive arena of ethics, beliefs and values.

What I am arguing here is that social subjects are embedded in particular ideologies, discourses and systems of belief in which their culture attempts to both hegemonise them and their construction of meaning, knowledge, truth and reality. These constructions are about what is valued and what is not. Here reference to value is understood in terms of relations of power, in terms of which group of subjects has greatest access to the generation of meanings and how these meanings

become naturalised and freed from the value positions from which they were discursively produced.

I argue that the descriptive systems, or discourses, through which the world and our experiences in and of it are described, are all embedded in values. Thus, the way we describe the world determines how we experience and value it; and the way we experience and value the world determines how we describe it.

Subjectivity is constructed through a continuous process of personal engagement in the discourses, institutions and practices that construct meaning and ascribe value to the lived experience of the subject and the world view or reality constructed by them.

(Bartky, 1990, p.118)

This deconstructive text, as a 'point of interrogation' (Lather, 1991, p.9), problematises received meanings, knowledges, facts and truths. Their context and meaning in lived experience, in everyday life, are understood as co-constructions; 'multiple, complex, open and changing, neither pregiven nor explainable by large scale causal theories, but made and remade across a range of multiple and scattered discursive practices' (Lather, 1991, p.43). This deconstructive text engages me in the project of speculating about the possibilities for 'unsettling received definitions, multiplying subject positions, unlearning our own privileges' (Lather, 1991, p.43).

I suggest that no ideology or discourse, no system of thought or belief is entirely closed or free from the possibility of disruption. What I seek are possibilities for erasure within regimes of power, knowledge and truth. In so doing the production of ideas, knowledges, meanings, truths and realities beyond those already frozen or fossilised is made possible.

Deconstruction rejects the complacency of the historical given by seeking to displace it.

(Heckman, 1992, p.165)

The struggle here is to write within/against, simultaneously inside and beyond the limits of current discourses and articulate a sense of 'the as yet unnameable' (Derrida, 1978, p.293). This struggle is political, theoretical and practical and is located in the discourses and discursive practices that circulate in everyday space. It is within these discourses, practices and spaces that the speaking/writing subject may articulate altered knowledges, truths and realities and invest them with new meanings. Yet I recognise that 'the interchange of (academic) discourse and (political) reality' (Kirkby, 1995,

p.210) does not take place easily, nor by simply 'wishing or writing it into existence' (Kirkby, 1995, p.210)

If the real is nothing more than the accretion of discourses, it has become real due to long practice and popular 'consent'. As academics, we refuse to sacrifice the possibility that changing discourses can change the way we live, but must delineate their means of interchange more complexly.

(Kirkby, 1995, p.210)

In the next chapter I will interrogate the construction of knowledge, truth and reality and in so doing search for possibilities for re-inscription that I, in turn, may re-inscribe myself.

Maybe Foucault was right when he said: 'to work is to try to think something other than what one thought before'.

(Barrett, 1991, p.vi)

CHAPTER THREE: knowledge, truth and reality

HER STORY

The earth is round and flat at the same time. This is obvious. That it is round appears indisputable; that it is flat is our common experience, also indisputable. The globe does not supersede the map; the map does not distort the globe.

Maps are magic. In the bottom corner are whales; at the top, cormorants carrying pop-eyed fish. In between is a subjective account of the lie of the land. Rough shapes of countries that may or may not exist, broken red lines marking paths that are at best hazardous, at worst already gone. Maps are constantly being re-made as knowledge appears to increase. But is knowledge increasing or is detail accumulating?

A map can tell me how to find a place I have not seen but have often imagined. When I get there, following the map faithfully the place is not the place of my imagination. Maps, growing ever more real, are much less true.

And now, swarming over the earth with our tiny insect bodies and putting up flags and building houses, it seems that all the journeys are done.

Not so. Fold up the maps and put away the globes. If someone else had charted it, let them. Start another drawing with whales at the bottom and cormorants at the top, and in between identify, if you can, the places you have not found yet on those other maps, the connections obvious only to you. Round and flat, only a very little has been discovered.

Winterson, 1990, p.81

Reading Winterson's text I am confronted by how perceptions, knowledges, facts and experiences may appear to be contradictory. I am confronted too by the realisation that these contradictions may be irreconcilable; that I may simultaneously know and not know, believe and not believe, remember and forget something that may or may not have ever happened, may or may not be real or true. So what counts as knowledge? What is real? What is true? In struggling to find out I am making a map of the journey I am taking. My points of reference are the questions I carry with me and the meanings I tentatively construct, and continually revise. In taking this journey and making this map I am striving to negotiate new pathways, destinations and narratives from among the old, familiar and already charted.

MY STORY

Moving pictures of childhood are spliced and rearranged, forming scenes of incoherent familiarity. Life is such. Fractured re/collections of incoherent moments mis/remembered as if real. As if having some substantive existence or meaning. This life is an accumulation of such random moments, moments ascribed pattern, meaning and purpose by equally random acts of compulsion and imagination. These moments, these acts, constitute a life. This life. Mine. My life is an annotation in the margins of a story already told. My place is marked. I know which narrative, which part, which words are mine. And I play my part. Sometimes I stumble, my words falter, but the performance is rehearsed over and over again so that the clumsiness recedes and the performance begins to appear, even begins to feel, natural. Spontaneous even. I even begin to believe that I know who I am. After all, I am told often enough. I posture and practice. I learn to construct a coherent narrative, a reality I believe in. A truth I can take to bed at night, with which I may comfortably sleep and dream. But this sleep, this dream, this truth, this knowledge, this reality, is fragile. Vulnerable. Easily disrupted. For in a fracturing moment all that was taken as real is shattered. My familiar is gone. I am confused. My body contorts in pain at the memory of this thing my mind has forgotten. My body, it seems, knows things my mind does not. This seems absurd. Incomprehensible. Ridiculous. How is it possible that my body might remember something that my mind has forgotten? It makes no sense to say this. But the sensation persists, as does the pain. Nothing is the same. What was familiar has become strange. What was formerly taken as true is now ambiguous. What was formerly taken to be real seems illusory. I am left in this nowhere place. Searching for a point of reference from which to begin to chart a new map. Start a new journey. Begin again in search of a moment of possibility. A moment of possibility lost in that fracturing, fragmenting moment of pain.

In reflecting on how my sense of truth, knowledge and reality have been discursively produced I am confronted by the extent to which the truths, knowledges and realities I accept as meaningful are fabrications made possible within a particular historical/political/social context. There is, it seems, a point at which my experiences are only mine in a notional sense. To the extent that I experience them as mine they are mine. But these experiences and their meanings are drawn from the social repertoire of experiences and meanings available to me. In this sense they are not mine: I have simply appropriated them, perhaps in an idiosyncratic way, or at least in a way that I sometimes believe to be idiosyncratic.

I understand that there are limits to experience, truth, knowledge and reality in any given context. In my current historical/political/social context my sexual behaviour is a criminal offence. I am subject to 25 years imprisonment. But is it true that I am a criminal? My self definition and social/legal definition contradict one another; so which is more real, or true? Clearly oppositional thinking cannot resolve the impasse. This is true also of my childhood recollections. Are they true? Did they really happen? How can I know? Which version of reality do I choose? How might I confidently settle on any particular account? There is a moment of anxiety in which I am haunted by this notion that experience is discursively produced. If I had no discourse of sexual abuse, rape or incest, what story would I tell, what memories would I select or create to describe a given moment in my childhood, and how would that story shape my sense of what I know, what is true and what is real for me now?

I am preoccupied with the processes and practices through which I have inscribed myself, body and mind, in terms of the categories sex, gender and sexuality. In reflecting on these things I have come to see that I am betrayed by those socially produced knowledges, meanings, truths and realities that come to me ready made as right, immutable and eternal, and which proscribe my perception of alternatives. This betrayal is simultaneously personal and social, individual and collective. Socially constructed knowledges, truths and realities make some things culturally intelligible and acceptable, others not. In this way some versions of reality are ascribed a status as natural, good, right and true and the political and ideological investments that determine them to be such are rendered neutral and invisible by these discourses of empirical fact and common good which betray the possibility of alternative versions of what counts as knowledge, truth and reality.

What follows represents my struggle to come to some understanding of the structures, processes and practices through which knowledges, truths and realities are constructed and made intelligible and how alternative versions may be generated according to different values and different purposes.

OUR STORY

The problems of the relationship between experience and theory, access to knowledge and the patriarchal structure and content of knowledge are of central importance to feminism.

(Weedon, 1991, p.7)

The many subjects and themes of this text diverge and coalesce at different moments in the narrative. Despite these many subjects and multiple themes this narrative is always about its author; my subject position, my lived experience, my capacity to know and understand. It is simultaneously motivated by a desire for personal transformation and social change. In reflecting on what I know, what I believe to be true and real I am struggling to open spaces within the discourses available to me in which I might rethink what it is that I know and believe, what it is that I take to be true and real. In reflecting on discourses of knowledge, truth and reality I am not attempting to take up a fixed position, arrive at a final conclusion, fully explore and debate the complexity of the issues, nor answer all questions. What I am attempting to do is clear a space in which I might articulate a narrative of possibility, of possibilities beyond those currently available or imagined. I am attempting to disrupt the familiar and make way for something different. I am continually struggling to articulate a narrative sense of myself and my subjects as simultaneously imaginary, symbolic and real. Finally, I am searching for an epistemology, a way of knowing myself, others and my world, that is not patriarchal, not phallogentric and not predicated on power.

I am preoccupied, in my own life narrative, with the issues of knowledge, truth and reality. I struggle with ambiguity, confusion, uncertainty and contradiction. I anxiously avoid assumptions of fixed and final truths, yet experience myself as a knower in a context that I take, however accurately or erroneously, to be real. Thus in this chapter I am concerned with the relationship between the ideological/discursive/ linguistic construction of meaning and the generation of knowledges and realities that assume the status of truth. I am concerned with how meanings attain hegemony and freeze or fossilise into formulations of, or formulae for, particular versions of truth, knowledge and reality. I am concerned also with how these truths, knowledges and realities are mapped onto the terrain of the subject, especially in terms of the body and consciousness, in the production of patriarchal subjects.

Patriarchal subjects are understood as co-constructions, formulated within meaningful configurations of a range of subject positions available in patriarchal regimes in particular historical/political/social moments in everyday spaces. I begin to map subjectivity in terms of the referents sex, gender and sexuality and in terms of the meanings that these referents acquire in patriarchal culture. This mapping is explored in more detail in subsequent chapters. In so doing I am challenging the confluences of same/normal/good and different/deviant/bad that inform binary thinking about that which is culturally acceptable and that which is not. Such normative evaluations are derived from positions of value, positions which may be invisible, but all the more powerful for being so.

For the most part, the ideas that people hold as valid reflect the activities they accept as normal, rather than the other way around.

(Birch, 1993, p.197)

What is familiar or enduring within culture comes to be accepted as natural, inevitable and true. Underlying this sense of what is normal are 'stereotypic definitions of masculinity and femininity that reflect the rigid gender categories that arise out of a patriarchal society' (Birch, 1993, p.215).

What I am arguing for is a conception of situated knowledges which accommodates 'a multifoundational theory and an anti-relativistic acceptance of difference' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.19). Hence I argue for knowledges which are foundational without being essentialist, relational rather than relative (a distinction taken up later in this chapter) and which emphasise the dialectical relationship between ideology, discourse, language, society, subjectivity, experience, truth, knowledge and reality.

I am proceeding on the understanding that conceptual categories, facts and assertions of truth are open to interrogation, contestation and transformation. Knowledge is understood to be socially produced, or suppressed, given particular, variable contexts and specific relations of power. French (1992, p.43) recognises that women have been systematically excluded from public/political life through the suppression of knowledge of their capabilities and achievements. Confined within patriarchal ideology to the domestic/private sphere the contributions to 'human knowledge and well-being' (French, 1992, p.43) made by female rulers, philosophers, scientists, artists, writers and inventors have been rendered invisible or less significant than the achievements of great men. Further the achievements of these women have been largely absent from patriarchal histories and school

curricula, and have thus not consolidated a place in the body of social knowledge considered to be important. In this way the assumption that a woman's proper place is in the home is maintained (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991).

In the last chapter I attempted to denaturalise language use and emphasise the interconnection between textuality and thought. Here I am emphasising that

thought is made of sense and value, it is the force or level of intensity, that fixes the value of an idea, not its adequacy to a pre-established normative model ... It is as if beyond/behind the positional content of an idea there lay another category - the affective force, level of intensity, desire or affirmation - that conveys the idea and ultimately governs its truth value. Thinking in other words, is to a very large extent unconscious, in that it expresses the desire to know, and this desire is that which cannot be adequately expressed in language, simply because it is that which sustains language.

(Braidotti, 1994, p.165)

Here Braidotti foregrounds the affective foundations of the thinking process and in so doing disrupts the hegemony of objectivity as the only indicator of what counts as credible, reliable knowledge.

It is increasingly recognised that the fact/value dichotomy simply drives facts underground. Facts are never theory-independent ... they are as much social constructs as are theories and values.

(Lather, 1991, p.51)

I argue that there is no single, absolute truth, or system through which such truths may be apprehended. Truth is rather, complex, multiple and situated in relations of power. The nexus between truth and power can be contested and disrupted in the formulation of different truths which are situated in explicitly articulated values. Such truths/ knowledges are conceived as being interactive and contextual, socially constituted, historically embedded and values based. Such truths/ knowledges are subject to the objective/subjective, true/false, right/wrong dualisms that are invoked to determine the validity of particular theories, articulations, or points of view. It is, I believe, incumbent on the writing/speaking subject to ground their spoken/written texts in theory/value and in so doing make visible the location from which they speak/write.

What I am arguing is that human communities are structured around frameworks of socially produced values. These structures are represented in and expressed through those legal, social, political pedagogical, religious, and other, institutions and practices which achieve hegemony and through which

all thoughts and actions are experienced, expressed, interpreted and evaluated. No thought or action is outside the performative possibilities, constraints or sanctions of these structures.

Thus human communities exist and cohere through frameworks of values which shape thoughts, actions, dreams, desires, imaginings and visions. It is through the social, and all institutions and practices implied within it, that we experience ourselves, others and our world. It is through the social that we construct our reality. It is also the site through which we construct and articulate our truths.

Truth, knowledge and reality are discursive constructions, located in particular historical, political and social contexts. As these contexts fossilise or shift, so discourses of truth fossilise and shift also. As contexts shift and discourses accommodate them, things become more or less true according to shifting knowledge, meanings and values. Truth, knowledge and reality are then, mobile and fluid, never outside relations of power. They are always fossilising and being disrupted, always in process. What I am attempting to articulate are truths and knowledges that reflect mobile realities, constantly in process, rather than realities apprehended and fixed for eternity. 'Has been' need not mean 'always will be'. In taking the view that knowledge, truth and reality are constructed it becomes both possible to interrogate the world as taken for granted and construct new knowledges, truths and realities.

Like Lather (1991) and Weedon (1991) I believe that new visions for generating social knowledge are required, visions which are capable of radically transforming patriarchal structures, practices and relations of power.

Poststructuralism holds that there is no final knowledge; 'the contingency and historical moment of all readings' means that, whatever the object of our gaze, it is 'contested, temporal and emergent'.

(Clifford and Marcus, 1986, pp.18-19) ; (Lather, 1991, p.111)

Poststructuralism problematises received knowledges, meanings and truths. It opens them to interrogation by taking the view that they are constructed rather than essential, constructions rather than essences. Poststructuralist theory thus provides a framework for unmasking, contesting, reimagining, redescribing and recreating our sense of the real. Thus, in producing this text, I am engaged in a project of

exploring and experimenting with new kinds of speaking/writing, forms of experience, and perspectives on the world. These do not necessarily claim a universal, objective value; but may openly see themselves as particular views, written from particular perspectives.

(Grosz, 1990, p.91)

I admit a particular view, a particular perspective. My view is limited by the territory, and the idiosyncratic mapping, of my always, already fictionalised lived experience and my ability to reinterpret or reimagine it. Such reworking of my familiar, habituated life is critical to my speculation about the possibilities for, and of, empowerment and transformation, both personal and social. In producing this self/text I am perpetually engaged with the struggle to know, and to know differently; to juxtapose that which comes to me ready made in culture with my feeling that truth and reality are more ambiguous, less definite, than the hardened forms that have shaped my sense of who I am, of my lived experience, of the nature and terms of my embodied subjectivity.

What I am attempting then is to dis/order and reorient myself in and through, newly situated knowledges, truths and realities. This is, as Hassan (1987) recognises, the problematic of postmodernism: 'to make of our disorders new knowledge' (Hassan, 1987, p.81).

Knowledge

The critical search for truth is constrained to be tolerant of ambiguity and pluralism, and its outcome will necessarily be knowledge that is relative and fallible rather than absolute or certain.

(Tarnas, 1991, p.396)

Knowing is ambiguous, partial, contradictory, made from 'a weave of knowing and not-knowing which is what knowing is' (Spivak, 1987, p.78). Knowledge is theory hardened into a given reality. Like Pile & Thrift (1995) I understand that 'theories are not 'objects' but living territories of contemplation, constantly on the move' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.24).

As Lather (1991) recognises we are, at this historical moment, experiencing 'an epochal shift marked by a thinking differently about the meaning of knowing' (Lather, 1991, p.86). This shift moves away from the concept of a found world toward a concept of constructed worlds.

we seem somewhere in the midst of a shift away from a view of knowledge as disinterested and toward a conceptualisation of knowledge as constructed, contested, incessantly perspectival and polyphonic.
(Lather, 1991, p.xx)

Instead of separating theory and practice, knowledge and experience, or conceiving of them as competing discourses I prefer, like Weedon (1991, p.7), to think in terms of transforming both the social relations of knowledge production and the type of knowledge produced. To do so requires that the issues of how and where knowledge is produced, by whom and what counts as knowledge be addressed. Like Lather (1991) I am searching for the possibilities for constructing emancipatory knowledge. Such knowledge aims to make visible the contradictions distorted or hidden by everyday understandings, and in so doing it directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configurations of social processes and practices (Lather, 1991, p.52).

For Lather (1991) the paradigm of modernity has created a space where 'we feel we cannot continue as we are' (Lather, 1991, p.86). In this new space 'consciousness and subjectivity rise to the fore in critical inquiry as the juncture between human agency and structural constraint takes on theoretical urgency' (Lather, 1991, p.109).

What I am struggling to articulate is a view of knowledge as embodied, perspectival, socially constructed and discursively produced within relations of power; a view which emphasises movement and variability and proposes a dialectical relationship between knower and known, subject and object, body and consciousness.

Knowledge, knower and known

Hare-Mustin & Marecek (1990) identify three core features of epistemology: who is the knower; what can be known; and how knowledge is established. These entail critical reflection on the relationship between knowledge and power. An understanding of how social relations structure what counts as valid or authentic knowledge is essential to the project of altering or transforming those relations of power. How, and what, we know depends on who we are. 'We are situated knowers located within a dynamic social structure' (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990, p.174). Knowing is thus relational, historical and reflexive.

It is relational in that it is dependent on the subject's position and participation within a community of knowers. It is historical in that it is a transitory process dependent on one's location within a temporally bound context. It is reflexive in that reflexivity is instrumental to how we know and also in that the knower is not separate from the known (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990, pp.174-5).

What is seen, understood and known results from the pattern of seeing carried within the observer/knower. I may be seen and understood by some to be effeminate, but my perceived effeminacy is not an essential quality that exists as meaningful without a point of reference. Rather, this perception is made possible by the carefully delineated social meanings, values and expectations that are carried and employed by both performing and observing social subjects. Berman (1990) suggests that since viewpoint is mediated through mental constructs, our perceptions of phenomena are determined not only by the things themselves, but also by our mindset, our individual consciousness and understanding.

This, in turn depends on our social interaction with phenomena ... Our viewpoint is therefore derived not only from our specific material conditions and relations but also from our understanding of them, our consciousness.

(Berman, 1990, p.242)

Social subjects are influenced by the particular belief system in which their culture initiates them and this system circumscribes their view of the world. This learned value system is projected onto the objects and events encountered or experienced by the subject. Perceptions, and evidence which supports those perceptions, are selected on the basis of those objects and experiences that reinforce the hegemonic discourses and belief systems of the culture. Thus subjects learn to see, to know and to understand that which culture teaches, indeed requires, them to see (Spender, 1992). Thus social subjects are programmed for a limited set of meanings which define, shape and limit the boundaries of lived experience. 'Contradictions tend to be censored, and we continue to see only that which is consistent with our established world view' (Spender, 1992, p.28). Yet this process, as an effect of culture, is neither fixed nor inevitable, and can be changed. Knowledge then is self-reflexive and constantly self-revising. Nothing can be taken for granted; everything is provisional; no absolutes can be assumed.

Knowledge is thus understood and described in terms of the possibilities of movement, change and transformation. Poststructuralist feminist theory interrogates

how our culture employs and privileges certain categories of thought and what relation these categories have to contemporary understanding of sexual difference.

(Gatens, 1991, p.85)

Whilst the historical and cultural construction of our conceptual schema goes unquestioned, the ideological and political nature of much of that conceptualisation remains invisible. Therefore critical reflection on these concepts is crucial to their transformation. Such reflection contests the existence of a monodimensional reality, absolute truth and value free knowledge. It also challenges the notion of a found world awaiting interpretation. Rather it stresses the importance of the observer and the uses to which their observations are put (Farangis, 1990, pp.181-9).

In challenging prevailing patriarchal models of knowledge Grosz (1988, pp.93-99) identifies three types of intellectual misogyny; sexist, patriarchal and phallogentric.

Sexism within knowledge is a 'series of specifically determinable acts of discrimination privileging men and depriving women' (Grosz, 1988, p.93). These acts include propositions, arguments, assertions and methodologies which result in unwarranted differential treatment of women and men.

Given that patriarchy is a structure that positions women and men differently, patriarchal knowledges ascribe different values and social meanings to women and men (Grosz, 1988, p.94). Patriarchal knowledges are thus systematic forms of oppression experienced by women as the objects of sexist knowledge.

Phallogentricism conflates the two sexes into a single, universal model. This model is, however, 'congruent only with the masculine' (Grosz, 1988, p.94). This model abstracts, universalises and generalises masculine attributes and renders invisible the reality of, or possibility for, autonomous definitions or representations of women and femininity. Phallogentricism is located in discourses which privilege men and masculinity and conceal alternative conceptions of the subject.

Grosz identifies five central features of the phallogentric paradigm through which the 'masculinity of knowledges' is constructed (Grosz, 1988, pp.97-99). They are expressed in terms of five epistemological commitments.

First, commitment to a perspectiveless, static truth which evades its own conditions of production and which invalidates, excludes and silences that which does not conform to this truth. Second, commitment to objectivist, value free concepts of knowledge founded on a model drawn from mechanistic science which relies on the interchangeability of invariant objective observers as proof of an invariant objective reality. Third, commitment to a model of knowledge in which language is simply an instrument through which a fixed reality is represented. Fourth, commitment to a separation between the knower and the thing known, between subject and object where knowledge can only be true and objective because it is separated from the social, political, historical and subjective contexts in which it is produced. Fifth, commitment to an intellectual system of concepts and categories whose identity and validity depends on its opposition to other terms. Notions of reason, truth and objectivity are thus described in terms of what they are not. Thus, they are not described substantively, but rather are described by their opposite or other where the privileged term is generated by the identification and devaluation of its opposite.

As informed by poststructuralist feminist theory, critical reflection on the process of knowledge production within patriarchal culture draws attention to the relationship between power and knowledge. In recognising this nexus, Foucault (1977) conflates the terms, power-knowledge. This conflation challenges the assumption that ideology can be demystified to reveal an undistorted, though hidden, truth. Power and knowledge are not seen as isolated from, or opposed to each other, but are rather seen as connected, inseparable and dialectically related.

Foucault (1977) argues that there is no power relation without the 'correlative constitution of a field of knowledge' (Foucault, 1977, p.54). Further, there is no knowledge that does not simultaneously presuppose and constitute relations of power. The discourses produced by power-knowledge are referred to by Foucault as 'regimes of truth'. Truth is thus linked with the systems of power-knowledge which produce and sustain it as well as the effects of the power-knowledge it creates. Thus for Foucault, power, knowledge and truth comprise an 'ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true' (1980, p.132).

Truth

It is in making claims to truth that discourses demonstrate their investment in particular versions of meaning as well as their hostility to change.

(Weedon, 1991, p.131)

I do not claim the status of truth for my text but rather position it between fiction and theory. I do not claim to challenge phallocentrism or unmask patriarchal falsehoods and replace them with truths differently arrived at. Rather, I attempt to reveal the investments patriarchal knowledges have in both representing and excluding some knowledges, some subjects, and how this is determined by relations of power.

Poststructuralist feminist theory problematises the aspiration to truth as an objective, verifiable eternal value, and unmasks its epistemological, political investments (Grosz, 1990). Relations between statements are emphasised rather than the relationship between statements and their reference to a 'real' world. Such a view informs critique of the concept of truth and foregrounds the role of theory in the interrogation of truths and the generation of new knowledges.

What I am arguing for here is the rejection of discourses through which knowledges or truths are defined as either absolute or relative. Rather, I am arguing for a situated, relational view of knowledge and truth which renders the binary opposition of absolute and relative obsolete.

Rather than privileging singular, value free and universal conceptualisations of truth, objectivity, neutrality and reason, poststructuralist feminist theory acknowledges its position as context and observer dependent and hence historically, politically, socially and sexually motivated. Poststructuralist feminist theory thus makes explicit how and where it is located, and articulates the conditions through which it has been constructed. Yet this does not suggest that 'feminists have embarked on false, subjective or irrational projects ... to sharply differentiate it from patriarchal knowledge' (Grosz, 1988, p.100). Like Grosz I argue that poststructuralist feminist theory is neither subjective nor objective, relativist or absolutist; rather, it occupies the middle ground excluded by oppositional categories. Whereas relativism has no notified position, poststructuralist feminist theory is relational; it occupies a position and is not neutral or free-floating. As located, relational and interested it does not rely on a historical universal criteria nor imply 'an anything goes attitude' (Grosz, 1988, p.100). Absolutism and relativism

ignore the material effects of power relations and the necessity of occupying a position within a socio-political context. Thus poststructuralist feminist theory contests patriarchal traditions and establishes criteria of validity founded on 'intersubjective understandings between different subjects' (Grosz, 1988, p.100) and not on the requirements of an objectivity which assumes the interchangeability of similar observers.

Spender (1992) suggests that the idea that there are many truths is no more difficult to sustain than the notion that 'there is only one truth, with its powerful demand for the denial of contradiction' (Spender, 1992, p.26). Yet I recognise that discourses that propose multiple, mobile, located deferred truths have been understood as, and criticised for, resulting in 'an indeterminate neutrality which perpetuates the status quo' (Heckman, 1992, p.164) and are therefore incapable of effecting a change in dominant accepted interpretations. However, I argue that such discourses are neither negative, nor neutral, but part of 'a radical strategy that centres on intervention' (Heckman, 1992, p.164). This intervention attacks the classical binary oppositions and displaces the discourses, practices and systems they create. Further, it recognises that the epistemological polarities of logocentric/dualist thought 'are located and reflected in both discursive and non-discursive formations, in linguistic and social structures' (Heckman, 1992, p.164).

Poststructuralist feminism proposes, and articulates, different, multiple perspectives from which the world and objects in it may be perceived and understood. However, despite this endorsement of difference and multiplicity, Farangis (1990) recognises that poststructuralist feminism aims to 'avoid the scourge of normative relativism which says that each of these perspectives is equally good' (Farangis, 1990, p.217). Rather Farangis claims that poststructuralist feminism is imbued with a moral dimension which runs counter to relativism and ethical neutrality. Thus, as a critical movement, it 'must try to create the conditions whereby we can intelligently and reasonably agree upon substantive values' (Farangis, 1990, p.217). Such a project is central to my purposes in producing this text. Here I am attempting to conceptualise possibilities for creating the social conditions in which empowered social subjects, liberated from relations of power, dominance and subordination, may construct more egalitarian communities. I recognise that this project is located in a particular set of ethical investments, and it is these investments that I am attempting to explore.

Truth, values and a community of knowers

Gatens (1991) observes that ethics have historically been the product of that group which has had most social power and control and hence monopolised moral and political right. Further, this group has historically been 'white, male, heads of households' (Gatens, 1991, p.138). Gatens argues that the universalised values of this group be replaced by an ethics that takes account of historical, social, ethnic and bodily differences. Such an ethics emphasises diversity and plurality as the basis of a 'polymorphous socio-political body' (Gatens, 1991, p.139). For such a body to be realised it will need to be capable of discriminating and respecting difference among its members. This will involve the ability to 'contextualise actions and their meanings rather than taking a relativist stand toward issues of ethics' (Gatens, 1991, p.139). A non-relativist approach implies an ability to 'hear and respond to many voices and many meanings' (Gatens, 1991, p.139). What is proposed then is a social body in communication with itself. Such communication is understood to imply that each member of that social body, whether an individual or a group, would not decide its moral codes for itself. Rather each member would interact with other individual or group members of the larger body.

The foundation for ethical judgements is neither a shared reason nor a common human essence but the practice of communicative ethics.

(Welch, 1991, p.86)

As understood by Welch, communicative ethics do not assume a cohesive community with a shared set of principles, norms and mores to be the necessary foundation of moral reasoning. Rather, Welch argues that what is more important for foundational moral critique is material interaction between multiple communities with divergent principles, norms and mores (Welch, 1990, p.86). Thus a cohesive community must have the means to critique constitutive forms of injustice, exclusion, limitation and oppression central to the operation of a given social system. In critiquing patriarchal ideologies, discourses, institutions, structures and practices I am attempting to illuminate the systemic and systematic oppression of patriarchal subjects, especially in terms of sex, gender and sexuality.

Thus the goal of communicative ethics is not merely consensus but mutual critique, critique which leads to more complex, negotiated and

continuously renegotiated understandings of what is just and how particular forms of justice may be achieved. Such critique, in the form of 'non-coercive dialogue' (Welch, 1991, p.92), aims to reach without force, a mutually acceptable understanding, the goal of which is 'to bring about an agreement that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, mutual trust and accord with one another' (Habermas, 1974, p.3).

Thus communicative ethics presuppose, and sustain, social transformation based on the process of dialogue, mutual critique and political action which contribute to a public discourse that is

simultaneously about the discourse of an engaged plurality and the formation of critical citizenship. This must be a discourse that breathes life into the notion of democracy by stressing a notion of lived community that is not at odds with the principles of justice, liberty and equality.

(Giroux, 1991, p.248)

Giroux (1991) asserts that such discourse allows for multiple, specific and heterogeneous ways of being and living, all of which imply an ethical framework of the sort proposed by Habermas (1974) and Welch (1991).

Foucault (1983) links his conception of subjectivity with his conception of ethics, a conception separate from, yet located within, the realm of morals. He draws a distinction between socially imposed and internally constructed moralities. Socially imposed moral codes determine which acts are permitted or forbidden and hence ascribed a positive or negative value. Internally constructed moral codes are founded on the ways and means by which individuals construct themselves as the moral subjects of their own actions. These practices of self-regulation or 'technologies of self' (Foucault, 1977) are not something that individuals invent in any original sense. Rather, they are patterns found in culture which are proposed, suggested and imposed on individual subjects by their culture, their society and their social group.

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.

(Foucault, 1977, pp.202-3)

Thus Foucault's conception of subjectivity confronts the technologies through which we make ourselves into subjects, and in so doing, participate

in our own subjectification. Yet within these technologies of the self there exist 'spaces of freedom' (Foucault, 1988, p.145) spaces opened out by way of the choices and specific practices with which we regulate our own actions. It is within the realm of these choices, practices and actions that we have the capacity to alter aspects of our subjectification. Thus I argue that the more aware we are of these practices the greater the space for altering those practices, and hence ourselves.

According to Foucault's analysis there will always be regimes of truth and technologies of self. Thus, the purpose of identifying spaces of freedom is not to escape all regimes and technologies. Rather, the purpose is to transcend the current ones. Such transcendence is a function of; increased awareness of current regimes and technologies; recognition that current regimes need not be as they are; and continued identification and entry into, those spaces of freedom (Foucault, 1988, p.145).

Thus no system of thought, ideology or discourse is entirely closed, or free from the possibility of disruption and transformation. Rather, there exist in these regimes of power/knowledge/truth, spaces of freedom. In searching out and moving into and through these spaces of freedom, thoughts, ideas, inscriptions, subjectivities, actions and practices beyond those currently available, are made possible. Ironically, these disruptive, fracturing practices may generate new power/knowledge/ truth regimes with their own ideological and discursive limitations, spaces of freedom and possibilities for disruption. Yet, it might become possible, in contexts where power, as we have come to understand and experience it within patriarchy, is no longer central to the social organisation of knowledge, truth and reality, to generate meanings that are currently unavailable, unimaginable and unutterable.

Power, knowledge and truth

Here I am arguing that all knowledge is interpretive, relational and produced within particular discursive frameworks which, depending on their ideological location, make various, sometimes competing, claims to truth. Theoretical discourses which claim to represent the world 'as it really is' struggle for hegemony, and attaining it, come to be accepted as true. They then claim to represent 'analytically true statements about social reality' (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992, p.237). When particular knowledges about

the world are privileged they are accepted across, and incorporated into, social institutions and assigned the status of truth. As truths they structure the world and exclude other interpretations of it. In this way power and knowledge intersect to produce socially accepted conventions about knowledge and the nature of reality. Crowley & Himmelweit (1992) recapitulate Foucault's assertion that the truth or falsity of knowledge is not something which can be established philosophically or empirically. Rather, claims to truth can only be made from within a discourse and social subjects are only able to construct an understanding of the world through the discourses available to them. Thus perception, knowledge and meaning are always structured within existing discursive arguments, and since they are constructed relationally their truth cannot be fixed. Such a view foregrounds the plurality and non-fixity of meaning which, since it is situated and contextual, asserts that it cannot be guaranteed by anything external to it (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992, p.236). Since the truth of a discourse resides in the relations of power it sustains and not in empirical reality, the function of critique is to challenge dominant ideas and reveal the power and interests that such views of the world sustain. For example, my homosexuality is legal in some countries and not in others. Thus it appears true that I am a criminal in some contexts and not in others. This truth is supported by various religious, medical, political and legal discourses which justify a variety of punishments, from stoning, whipping, the amputation of hands and feet, imprisonment and execution (Spencer, 1995, pp.384-6). It is clear that within a patriarchal hierarchy of masculinities homosexual men are less powerful than those who conform to the culturally exalted form of hegemonic masculinity.

Central to Foucault's concept of the subject is analysis of the ways in which power is deployed in the production of meaning. For Foucault (1980) power is consolidated through dominant ideas which congeal into a common, commonsense view of the world which constitutes a 'regime of truth'.

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

(Foucault, 1980, p.131)

As understood by Gore (1993) Foucault's conception of power-knowledge exists only in action, and is actualised at the site of the body, in

our actions and behaviours. This results in 'political regimes of the body' (Gore, 1993, p.55). These political regimes of the body refer to the actualising of regimes of truth 'in, on, through and around the body' (Gore, 1993, p.55). Like Foucault, Gore (1993) asserts that socio-political structures rely on the self-regulation of its bodies who construct themselves in accordance with both regimes of truth and political regimes of the body. This is achieved not only, or simply, by coercive external forces or practices, but also by securing individual willingness to comply. This act of compliance, referred to by Foucault (1977) as 'technologies of the self', is achieved through acts of conformity and self-regulation which 'elicit specific practices which are enacted at the site of the body' (Gore, 1993, p.55). Thus regimes of truth organised around dichotomised sex/gender produce bodies which appear and behave in ways that confirm and naturalise, the dichotomised categories through which they are constructed.

Power is activated when people assume identities that are included within the prevailing view of the world. By occupying certain places within a discourse, the subject, according to Foucault, is empowered to act according to the identity prescribed by that discourse.

(Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992, p.236)

Regimes of truth, in producing particular regimes of the body, 'work on the mind and emotions, on the unconscious, and yes, on the soul, the spirit, through the work done on, to, by, with and from the body' (Gore, 1993, p.55). Thus individual subjects act in specific, discursively produced ways, 'in order to transform themselves and attain a certain state of being' (Gore, 1993, p.91). Gore observes that, as situated in, and by poststructuralist feminist discourses, subjects are similarly able to act on their bodies, thoughts, emotions, desires, behaviours and ways of being 'in order to reclaim themselves' (Gore, 1993, p.91) from patriarchal structures.

I argue that we can resist those structures, discourses and regimes that fail to allow us the means of modifying them. We must, therefore, attempt to disturb and disrupt the categories of knowledge/power that oppress us (Heckman, 1992, p.182).

Truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions, worn out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses; coins which have their obverse effaced and are now no longer of account as coins but merely as metal.

(Nietzsche, 1964, p.180)

Thus truth is no more than 'a set of congealed, or frozen metaphors whose metaphorical status has become mistaken for the literal' (Grosz, 1993, p.58). Such a view challenges the notion of objectivity as disembodied, value free knowledge and suggests that knowledge is, rather, a function of 'the embodied expression of our affective investment in the world - knowing and feeling, seeing and speaking, conception and perception, situation and expression' (Conway, 1993, p.112).

Knowledge is thus generated in particular contexts and from particular perspectives. Claims for a perspectival knowing means that knowledge is only possible if one's affective engagement with the world is both recognised and expressed. Knowledge is thus 'an aggregation of radically situated perspectives (or bodies) - none of which affords us an epistemically pure glimpse of the world' (Conway, 1993, p.113).

Perspectival, relational knowledges and truths are thus always partial and not simply appearances beneath which there is a stable reality. Rather, there are only perspectives, only appearances and only interpretations: 'There is nothing beyond the multiplicity of perspectives, positions, bodily forces, no anchor in the real' (Grosz, 1993, p.61).

There is, then, no single truth. Rather, there exists 'a multiplicity of mutually inconsistent truths dependent on the particular conditions constituting different kinds of discourse' (Sadler, 1993, p.229). Since these perspectives cannot be understood nor judged in terms of an ultimate reality, the varying degrees of usefulness of various perspectives depend on the purposes they serve. Though these purposes are contextual and historically variable, some have become 'hardened and fixed in the course of time, giving the impression that they are true in some absolute sense' (Sadler, 1993, p.229).

Poststructuralist feminist theory foregrounds the ways in which gender is a critical factor in determining and limiting what counts as truth. For Dworkin (1991) the given patriarchal reality is structured on the principal that there are two sexes; male and female. Further, these two sexes are understood as opposites, as complementary polarities of human existence which unite naturally into a harmonious whole. We are, says Dworkin, 'living inside a pernicious delusion, a delusion on which all reality as we know it is predicated' (Dworkin, 1991, p.110).

Reality

The postmodern crisis of representation ... is an erosion of confidence in prevailing concepts of knowledge and truth. Whatever the 'real' is it is discursive. Rather than dismissing 'the real', postmodernism foregrounds how discourses shape our experience of 'the real' in its proposal that the way we speak and write reflects the structures of power in our society.

(Lather, 1991, p.25)

Such a view disrupts claims to totality, certainty and universality and seeks to do more than displace or reverse oppositional thinking; it seeks to make a difference, to 'take a stand, act, assess' (Lather, 1991, p.25) whilst recognising the contingency and historicity of values.

Within poststructuralist feminist theory it is possible to 'choose between different accounts of reality on the basis of their social implications' (Weedon, 1991, p.29). Critical reflection on the hegemonic discourses through which social reality is constructed and described is central to the generation of different, preferred realities. Reality as spoken/written can be contested and transformed, can be respoken/rewritten. Reality, then, is open to multiple interpretations, multiple readings and multiple uses. It is not a solid self contained given, but a fluid, unfolding process constantly open to revision and shaped by human actions and beliefs (Appleyard, 1993; Davies, 1982; Capra, 1983; Griffin, 1988; Reaney, 1991; Shepherd, 1993). Reality is understood more as possibility than fact, and more in terms of relationships than fixed discrete objects. Further, since we are constantly implicated and engaged in the process of constructing reality we are simultaneously transforming both it and ourselves. I argue that the apprehension of reality is not a function of the passive reflection of an external, intrinsically ordered world, but is rather an active process of perception and cognition. The discursive production of meanings, concepts and symbols is fundamental to the creation and interpretation of reality. 'Reality is in some sense constructed by the mind, not simply perceived by it, and many such constructions are possible, none necessarily sovereign' (Tarnas, 1991, p.396). In this view, understanding is interpretation, and no interpretation is final. Thus the nature of truth and reality, as discursive constructions, is 'radically ambiguous' (Tarnas, 1991, p.397) and grounded in the relationship between knower and known.

Davies (1990) asserts that because we experience the world through our interactions with it, the world we actually experience cannot be totally objective. Thus, it is the mutual interaction between observer and observed

that supplies the sensation or illusion of a surrounding reality. Further, our sense of this reality is informed by our interpretive model of the world, a model constructed by 'experience, emotional predisposition, expectation and so on' (Davies, 1990, p.108). Thus, as with the example of my supposed effeminacy, the reality we perceive and the category system that makes such perception possible cannot be separated (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990).

Since knower and known, observer and observed are understood to be intimately related, the subject/object dualism is collapsed; objects or data have no meaning separate from acts of observation and interpretation by the subject. Thus we can no longer assume that the world we see is the world that is: 'Rather the world we see is the world we make' (Reanny, 1994, p.49). We are, in this way, engaged in the construction of an intellectual map of reality, classifying, categorising, prioritising and dividing the world into separate recognisable, nameable objects and events. Whilst these divisions may be useful they cannot, says Capra (1983) be taken as a fundamental feature of reality. They are, rather 'abstractions devised by our discriminating and categorising intellect' (Capra, 1983, p.141). Reality then is constructed in such a way that we are able to make sense of it and acts of cognition operate within a given spectrum with the result that we see, think and know the way we do because we have learned to do so (Drury, 1989, p.13). This selective perception involves the filtering of data to produce a modified, socially mediated, consensual reality.

We assume when we are born that there is an external world out there and that all we have to do is see it. This is quite false. Our model of reality is our own, and though much of our model overlaps and coincides with those of others it is fundamentally a necessary convenience, a magnificent lie'.

(Reanny, 1991, pp.178-9)

I am here arguing that our sense of reality is a persuasive fiction, confirmed by the reassurances of a socially constructed consensual reality. The fictional symbols used in the domain of perception and conceptualisation are projected onto the world in such a way as to create the illusion that they are naturally occurring phenomena and events. We do not simply perceive a world separated from us, rather we perceive, choose and act from a range of possibilities and actively construct our sense of the real. Given the view that consciousness brings forth particular configurations of reality from a range of complex and multiple possibilities, then 'consciousness is the faculty in the mind that creates reality' (Reanny, 1991, p.181). Yet this process is not

arbitrary. Only realities that are self-consistent, or consistent with consensual reality, endure.

Consensual reality

Consensual reality implies that society, comprising those who form the category 'other' as opposed to 'self', plays a role in the structure of our conscious experiences (Searle, 1992). Conscious experiences are intentional and perspectival; they are always from a point of view. Experience and perception are thus partly a function of expectation; we see or perceive that which we expect to see, and expectation is learnt through those discursive practices that teach us what is real and hence, what to expect. Thus we find what we expect to find, see what we expect to see and perceive what we expect to perceive. 'A natural corollary of this claim is that the organisation of perception is only possible given a set of categories that identify entities within the familiar' (Searle, 1992, p.136).

Meaning-making then, involves categorisation, and these categories exist prior to experience. It is upon the basis of these familiar consensual categories that meaning may be constructed from what is perceived and experienced.

Conscious experiences come to us as structured, those structures enable us to perceive things under aspects, but those aspects are constrained by a mastery of a set of categories.

(Searle, 1992, p.136)

Knowledge, truth and reality, as socially mediated discursive constructions, are multi-dimensional, variable and complex. Thus an 'abstract system of conceptual thinking can never describe or understand this reality completely' (Capra, 1983, p.35) but rather 'we can only expect an approximate representation of reality from such a procedure' (Capra, 1983, p.35). This approximate representation is ideological, discursive, conceptual, symbolic, and linguistic and suggests that 'knowledge is constructed, contextual and mutable' (Shepherd, 1993, p.36). Our perceptions, meanings and knowledges of the world are thus experience and context dependent, and a function of the ways in which we learn to interpret them. Our apprehension of and adaptation to the world is based on agreement with others about what we see and experience. Thus reality is a consensual social construction and this

consensual reality is a result of, and results in, 'conceptual boundaries that are structured in our consciousness' (Shepherd, 1993, p.98). There is therefore, no 'right way' to perceive the 'real world'. Rather, there are multiple ways in which reality may be perceived. Yet, the formulation of a consensual reality requires that we freeze that field of possibilities into a certain, given, naturalised and taken for granted reality. The construction of consensual reality then involves acts of perception and cognition, which, expressed through language, result in the construction of particular knowledges, truths and realities. As argued in a previous chapter these constructions of knowledge, truth and reality are achieved through language, discourse and ideology.

Reality, discourse and language

The world is intelligible only through discourse: there is no unmediated experience, no access to the raw reality of self and others.

(Belsey, 1996, p.359)

Our sense of self, our subjectivity, cannot be separated from our sense that we have a name, and that we can name our reality: 'We are our names' (Rosenfield, 1993, p.120). Names establish relationships between people, events and objects. Further, the act of naming reflects our understanding of relations, associations and abstractions. The acquisition of language depends on the ability to create generalisations and establish relations between discourses and lived experience. Language connects, interrelates and abstracts images and is implicated in the ways in which we organise our experience in, on and with the world (Belsey, 1990; Cameron, 1990; Davies, 1989, 1993, 1994; Weedon, 1991).

Cameron (1990) recognises that whilst we believed that 'reality' or 'the world' simply existed 'out there', ready-made for our apprehension as a 'series of images with names attached' (Cameron, 1990, p.94) then the question of the constitutive effects of language on our perceptions was not at issue. The view of a made reality, not a found one, foregrounds the role of language, ideology and discourse in the construction of reality, knowledge and truth. Through language we classify, name, categorise and order 'what would otherwise be undifferentiated meaningless chaos' (Cameron, 1990, p.94).

The linguistic categories available within culture, the models of explanations that are privileged, and the dominant cultural ideology, influence the construction of reality. The belief that something is real, is plausible not because it reflects the world, but because it is 'constructed out of what is discursively familiar' (Belsey, 1991, p.47). There is then 'no world without words' (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990, p.1) and all communication is predicated on context and patterns of relationships. Further, under conditions of social inequality, privileged members of society have control over meaning-making. Thus, representations of reality serve the interests of those who make them (Friere, 1990). 'Hegemony translates, through power and privilege, from the privileged members to the meanings and discourses they generate' (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990, p.xii). As a consequence some versions of reality, truth and knowledge have hegemony over others. It is only when these privileged discourses are disrupted that they become unstable and other previously suppressed or marginalised meanings may emerge. What is at issue here then, is not simply what or how we think. Rather, what and how we think, grow out of, and limit, the character of the social relationships we have and hence the meanings, knowledges and realities we construct. Thus, reality is social; it is 'whatever people at a given time believe it to be' (Dworkin, 1991, p.109). For Dworkin, reality is always a function of politics in general, and sexual politics in particular, where socially mediated consensual reality serves the powerful by justifying their right to dominate those less powerful.

Thus I argue that reality is circumscribed by the discourses within which social institutions are constructed. This is self perpetuating, for the social institutions built on these premises also embody and enforce those premises. Reality is enforced by those whom it serves so that it appears to be self evident, and it is made self evident through the ideology of common sense. Further, 'by making hegemonic sets of assumptions visible, the nature of what we take to be factual or real is profoundly shifted' (Davies, 1994, p.20).

Common language, common sense, common reality

Common sense, says Weedon (1991) consists of a 'number of social meanings and the practical ways of understanding the world which guarantee

them' (Weedon, 1991, p.75). These meanings, which represent only the interests of particular social groups become fixed and widely accepted as true. Common sense relies on a naive view of language as transparent and true. The power and authority of common sense knowledge is derived from its claims to be natural and obvious, and therefore true. Common sense then is the medium through which truths about the world, society and individuals are represented and expressed as fixed and absolute.

Common sense demands we 'use language which gives the appearance of clear referential meaning and conceals the artifice that produces this appearance of objectivity' (Lather, 1991, p.91).

Poststructuralist feminist discourses question assumptions of common sense and in so doing dislodge those beliefs which take the authority of the concept common sense for granted as obvious and natural.

Belsey (1991) argues that the 'obvious' and the 'natural' are not given, but produced in a specific society 'by the ways in which that society talks and thinks about itself and its experience' (Belsey, 1991, p.3). Common sense appears obvious and natural not as a function of an independent objective reality but rather because it is inscribed in the language we speak, a language which is neither neutral nor transparent. If, as Belsey (1991), Cameron (1990) and Weedon (1991) suggest, the transparency of language is an illusion, then language, ideology, knowledge and reality may be seen as situated in discourses which are constructed through relations of value and power. Thus, meaning, knowledge and reality are discursive and constructed through the reproduction and repetition of the familiar. As repetitions they become 'caricatures of reality' (Ornstein & Ehrlich, 1991, p.196).

These caricatured repetitions become common currency in the generation of social discourses about common sense knowledges, truths and realities. These social discourses solidify into sets of ready made meanings and form 'lay social theories' (Haste, 1993, p.10) on which subjects come to rely for the generation of knowledges and understandings about particular issues or events.

A lay social theory is a scenario for explanation which contains schemas about how things work. The scenario tells a story, gives an account, provides a script.

(Haste, 1993, p.10)

Lay social theories imply certain desirable outcomes and shared socially acceptable concepts and beliefs. Individual subjects are able to

communicate their lay social theory because it is derived from the available cultural repertoire. Individual subjects may believe their version of the scenario or script to be particular to them, but the resources for this process of making sense are available only within the culture in which they are situated and are intersubjective and constantly socially negotiated in ordinary interaction. Stereotypes and metaphors are central to this process of sense making and negotiating and constructing knowledge.

Stereotype and metaphor

Metaphor is the bridge between individual thinker and social context, between existing ideas and new ideas, between where one person is and where the interlocutor wants to take that person. We need metaphors and analogies to explain new concepts, to resolve uncertainty or misunderstanding. We need metaphors to communicate new ideas, to move between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Metaphors underpin our taken-for-granted assumptions about the world.

(Haste, 1993, p.11)

Stereotypes and metaphors are frames which serve as categories for grouping things. Metaphors describing subjectivity prescribe and limit options for taking up subject positions and interpreting the subject positions taken up by others. Within patriarchal ideologies and discourses polarity or dualism is a common principle for the organisation of these metaphors and stereotypes (Goodison, 1992; Davies, 1993; Haste, 1993). Dualistic, oppositional, hierarchical metaphors carry evaluative connotations and affect interpretations and explanations of behaviour as well as assumptions and expectations. Metaphors explain relationship and in a dualistic metaphor the implied relationship between the two aspects or poles is one of opposition.

Poststructuralist feminist theory contests simplistic binarisms which 'squeeze the multiplicity and variability of everyday life into binary categories' (Davies, 1993, p.53). These binarisms are taken up as one's own 'both as a way of telling about the world and as a way of feeling' (Davies, 1993, p.55) and as a way of positioning oneself in relation to the world of knowledge and knowing, especially in terms of one's gendered subjectivity. In this view, seemingly apparent, common sense assumptions and knowledges about femininity and masculinity have less to do with empirical fact or evidence

than they do with the social values of the society in which they were produced (Kaplan & Rogers, 1990, p.205).

Discourses about sex, gender and sexuality thus rely on stereotypical/metaphorical meanings for their production and articulation. In this way conceptions of difference between the sexes, of sex roles and sexual relations, come to be couched in metaphors that explain and justify them. Further, the metaphors derived from gender and sexuality permeate other dimensions of social structures and relations. Within patriarchy the primary metaphors of gender are dualism and polarity and difference is understood in terms of hierarchy and opposition. The power of the metaphor is derived from the way in which it maps other dualities onto gender and this process operates in a continuous cycle, constantly reinforcing and reproducing itself. Common sense ideas and everyday thinking are so deeply embedded in the metaphors of gender, and the analogies associated with them, that we take them for granted. 'They are so embedded that we are not conscious that they are metaphors' (Haste, 1993, p.12). It is not surprising then that these metaphors, deeply rooted in our subject positions, are resistant to questioning and the development of a self-reflexive critical consciousness. Indeed 'the concepts we carry for making sense of the world have so deeply entered our consciousness, our gender identities, there is a great deal of emotional investment in our world-views' (Haste, 1993, p.15). Confronting issues of sex, gender and sexuality entails acknowledging the role that such investments, and the desire, pleasure and anxiety they entail, play in sustaining the existing frameworks. Further, these frameworks play a significant role in fulfilling those desires, and assuaging those anxieties.

Haste (1993) cautions that we should not underestimate the power of cognitive categories nor overlook the roles of dualism and metaphor in their construction. She suggests that stereotyping 'minimises the intellectual effort' (Haste, 1993, p.3) of dealing with the mass of information about other people.

Whilst critiques of gender need to interrogate the processes by which femininity and masculinity are mapped onto other areas of cultural life, they need also to take into account 'the depth of our engagement with our own gender identity' (Haste, 1993, p.4). Thus such critique is necessarily self-reflexive and motivated towards unmasking the structures, processes and practices through which the subject, the lived experience of the subject, and the everyday lives of the subject are made meaningful through the discursive construction of knowledge, truth and reality.

It is extremely convenient to make assumptions simply on the basis of whether a person is male or female. To have these neat assumptions challenged or questioned disturbs the cool tenor of the mind. Therefore, even if dualism were only a cognitive category, there would be problems in changing it. By mapping masculine and feminine onto so many other dimensions to which we also ascribe polarity, we deepen the problem.

(Haste, 1993, p.3)

Construction, deconstruction and invention

Poststructuralist feminist discourses of truth, reality and knowledge emphasise the constructed nature of cognition, perception and subjectivity, all of which are integral to, and result in, a constructed truth, reality and knowledge. Having been constructed these can be deconstructed and re/constructed. The principles of constructivism and deconstruction challenge both the idea of a single meaning of reality and of a single truth. Rather than searching for 'the truth' they interrogate the ways in which meanings are negotiated and how meanings are represented in language. This interrogation dislodges essentialist theories of truth and asserts that meanings are historically situated, constructed and reconstructed through language and located in the relation between meaning and power. Language then, structures our individual experience of a socially mediated reality.

Constructivism asserts that we do not discover reality, we invent it. Our experience 'does not directly reflect what is out there' (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1991, p.27) but is rather a selecting, ordering and organising of it. Rather than passively observing reality we actively construct the meanings that frame and organise our experience, knowledge and the meanings we make from them. Thus our understanding of reality is a representation, not an exact replica of what is out there waiting to be seen, known and understood.

Every object of knowledge is already part of a preinterpreted context, and beyond that context are only other preinterpreted contexts. All human knowledge is mediated by signs and symbols of uncertain provenance, constituted by historically and culturally variable predispositions, and influenced by often unconscious human interests.

(Tarnas, 1991, p.397)

In this view, representations of reality are shared meanings derived from a shared language, history and culture. The 'realities' of social life are products of language and agreed meanings. Constructivism challenges the

scientific tradition of positivism which posits a fixed reality which can be directly observed without influence from the observer. Constructivism also challenges the belief that it is possible to distinguish facts from values. Rather, values and attitudes determine what are taken to be facts. Thus, knowledge cannot be disinterested or politically neutral.

For Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1993) 'Reality as we perceive it and the category system by which we perceive it are ... indissoluble' (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1991, p.194). Discourses only make visible 'those objects or problems that occur within its horizons and upon its terrain' (Coward, 1983, p.1). Other objects and problems are marginalised and rendered invisible. Yet there are, says Coward, oversights, omissions and blank spaces in these discourses that may be made visible by a 'new and informed gaze' (Coward, 1983, p.81) and made possible by 'changes on the exercise of vision, changes in social and political conditions' (Coward, 1983, p.81). My exploration of ideology, discourse and language in chapter two, and of knowledge, truth and reality in this chapter has been motivated by the desire to develop a new and informed gaze, to imagine and articulate possibilities for changing social and political conditions.

Deconstruction is a means of disrupting understandings of reality by revealing alternative meanings. New meanings admit new possibilities for thought and action and may thus foster change. Thus deconstruction offers a means of examining the ways in which language operates 'outside our everyday awareness to create meaning' (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1991, p.46).

Dominant meanings, those considered more 'true', 'right' or 'revealing' are often embedded in 'everyday language and commonplace metaphors' (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1991, p.50). Deconstruction challenges linguistic conventions by unpacking metaphors and meanings to reveal the process of their production. In so doing these meanings may be disrupted, enabling new meanings to emerge. As multiple meanings become apparent more possibilities for change also emerge.

Since both knowledge and the knowing subject are socially negotiated and constructed they are open to deconstruction and reconstruction. This is a social and political project aimed at challenging and transforming those discourses which have hegemony in any given culture or historical moment. Deconstruction involves critique of those social structures which determine the hegemony of particular ideas, beliefs and values in relation to the construction of both individual and social subjectivities and realities. For Giroux (1984) critical theory explores possibilities for change by identifying

spaces of opposition and resistance within discourses. Given that ideology functions not only to limit human action, but also enable it, ideology 'creates a terrain for self reflection and transformative action' (Giroux, 1984, p.314).

The goal of deconstruction is to keep things in process, to disrupt, to keep the system in play, to set up procedures to continually demystify the realities we create and to fight for our categories to congeal.

(Lather, 1991, p.120)

Rather than separating the 'true' from the 'false', deconstruction aims to destabilise assumptions of interpretive validity and shift the emphasis to the contexts in which meanings are produced. Context and meaning are posited as co-constructions which are multiple, complex, open and changing (Lather, 1992).

Within patriarchal discourses and discursive practices both context and meaning are subject to, and co-constructions of, a binary system of hierarchical dualistic oppositions. Further, both knower and known are also co-constructions of this dichotomised reality. Fundamental to this reality is the male/female dualism onto which all other hierarchical oppositions are mapped. Thus, knowledge, knower and the reality known are all gendered.

Representations of reality and theories of gender are organised within particular assumptive frameworks that reflect certain interests. Thus, from a constructivist standpoint, the 'real' or 'true' nature of male and female cannot be determined. Rather, attention is given to representations of gender, and to the consequences of these representations. Thus, the ways in which representations of gender provide the meanings and symbols that organise social reality and the lived experience of the subject become the locus of concern.

Like Connell (1994) I recognise that 'gender relations invest the whole of social life and the production of all knowledge' (Connell, 1994, p.12). The system of classification upon which knowledge is constructed is communicated through 'the whole structure of our experience within society' (Goodison, 1992, p.32). This institutionalisation and communication of categories and knowledges so saturates both consciousness and experience that they come to be seen as 'natural' or 'real', 'so much so that no alternative view seems possible' (Goodison, 1992, p.32).

Yet, as Foucault (1988) has suggested, no ideology or discourse is entirely closed, or impervious to the possibility of disruption and transformation. Rather, there exist in these regimes of power/knowledge/truth,

spaces of freedom. In searching out and moving into and beyond these spaces, thoughts, ideas, inscriptions, subjectivities, actions and practices beyond those currently available are made possible. Yet, ironically, these disruptive practices generate new power/knowledge/truth regimes, with their own ideological and discursive limitations, spaces of freedom and possibilities for disruption.

As understood by Lather (1991) poststructuralism emphasises the need for critical reflection on our interpretive frames and exploration of ways of knowing which interrupt relations of dominance and subordination. This involves seeking out and mobilising 'those discourses/practices seeking to challenge the legitimacy of the dominant order and break its hold over social life' (Lather, 1991, p.xv).

Within poststructuralist theory, knowledge, truth and reality are characterised by: an appreciation of the plasticity of a constantly changing reality and body of knowledge; a stress on the priority of concrete experience over fixed abstract principles; and a conviction that no single a priori thought system should govern belief or investigation. It recognises that knowledge is subjectively determined by a multitude of factors, that objective essences are neither possible nor accessible and that the value of all truths and assumptions must be continually subjected to direct testing and scrutiny.

In moving from a static dualistic model to a dynamic dialectical one, knowledges and epistemologies of certainty and absolutes are disrupted by knowledges that emphasise multiplicity and possibility. Yet the shift from absolute truths, knowledges and realities 'need not degenerate into a view from everywhere and thus from nowhere' (Luke, 1992, p.47). It is possible to avoid 'slipping into a relativism of endless difference by standing firm on contextual and theoretical limits' (Luke, 1992, p.47). These limits to difference, uncertainty, multiplicity, partiality, and locality are observed within the process, and through the practice, of locating and articulating perspective, experience and knowledge in historical, political and social contexts.

Thus situational, perspectival, relational knowledges, truths and realities are neither neutral nor free floating, but located in 'specific historical, cultural and political trajectories which are always in historic relation to other trajectories, other relations of domination' (Grosz, 1988, p.100). In defining the context in which this text is spoken/written as patriarchal I understand that

The univocity of sex, the internal coherence of gender, and the binary framework for both sex and gender are considered throughout as regulatory fictions that consolidate and naturalise the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression.

(Butler, 1990, p.33)

It is this understanding of both my own subjectivity and that of others as regulatory fictions that informs the production of this text. This self-reflexive text is motivated by a struggle to come to know myself differently, and this struggle engages me in critical reflection upon the terms, and tenuity, of my knowledge, of my reality, of my truth. I am struggling to come to some knowing, some understanding, of how I have acted as a social subject to inscribe myself in terms of the sex/gendered/sexualised subject positions available to me and how this inscription might be invested with new, different or liberating meanings.

I have attempted in this chapter to locate the subject in relation to a set of structures and practices through which they and their knowledges, truths and realities are discursively constructed, articulated and lived. I am thus struggling toward an understanding of the subject as an embodiment of discursive possibilities. I argue that the embodied subject is understood as meaningful in terms of a set of related co-ordinates, sex, gender sexuality and so on, and that the knowledges, truths and realities that inform the performance of those meaningful subjectivities will reflect the co-ordinates through which they are inscribed, described and proscribed.

Thus where sex, gender and sexuality are primary categories through which embodied subjects are inscribed, then the knowledges, truths and realities those subjects construct or privilege will be similarly inscribed. Thus I argue that knowledge, truth and reality are sexed/gendered/sexualised discursive constructions.

In the following chapter I undertake an exploration of the relationship between social structure, subjectivity and agency. In reflecting on the discursive construction of sexed/gendered/sexualised subjectivities I hope to locate spaces of freedom for invention and reinscription, for the construction of new subject positions, knowledges, truths and realities.

What we call experience, or history, is this endless progressive structuring of events. We rewrite history, we revise our notions of our experiences, by restructuring our thoughts about people and events in our past.

(Rosenfield, 1993, p.86)

CHAPTER FOUR: society, subjectivity and agency

HER STORY

You may have heard of Rapunzel.

Against the wishes of her family, who can best be described by their passion for collecting miniature dolls, she went to live in a tower with an older woman. Her family were so incensed by her refusal to marry the prince next door that they vilified the couple, calling one a witch and the other a little girl. Not content with names, they ceaselessly tried to break into the tower, so much so that the happy pair had to seal up any entrance that was not on a level with the sky. The lover got in by climbing up Rapunzel's hair, and Rapunzel got in by nailing a wig to the floor and shinning up the tresses flung out of the window. Both of them could have used a ladder, but they were in love.

One day the prince, who had always liked to borrow his mother's frocks, dressed up as Rapunzel's lover and dragged himself into the tower. Once inside he tied her up and waited for the wicked witch to arrive. The moment she leaped through the window, bringing their dinner for the evening, the prince hit her over the head and threw her out again. Then he carried Rapunzel down the rope he had brought with him and forced her to watch while he blinded her broken lover in a field of thorns.

After that they lived happily ever after, of course.

As for me, my body healed, though my eyes never did, and eventually I was found by my sisters, who had come in their various ways to live on this estate.

Winterson, 1987, p.52

Winterson's retelling of Rapunzel foregrounds the constructedness of narrative. In disrupting the familiar, known and learned narrative she demonstrates how that which has been discursively produced may be reproduced, and altered in the retelling. This alteration draws attention to the ideological investments which shape the narrative and make it culturally intelligible. Here, Winterson invests the same characters and plot with new meanings, motives and subject positions. A patriarchal ordering, including a justification of vilification and murder through the naming 'lesbian' and 'witch', is disrupted not so much by an alternative non-patriarchal order but by retelling the narrative from a perspective which unmasks those previously invisible, taken for granted elements of the narrative which associate the prince with power, moral right and justice. Here the patriarchal order remains, but remains to be seen differently. This is my struggle, to simultaneously think/speak/write within and against the discourses and narratives to which I am subjected and through which my subject position is constructed and taken up.

In producing this text I am attempting to find ways of retelling myself, of unmasking and disrupting the investments I place in that particular set of subject positions I refer to as my self. In so doing I am searching for ways of constructing new narratives through which new performances are made possible. I also hope to disrupt the familiarity and naturalness of the patriarchal narratives through which subjects are inscribed, especially in terms of sex, gender and sexuality. In the following story I want to capture a particular moment, a moment in which I found an alternative location from which to perceive and experience my homosexuality.

Finally I want to read Winterson's retelling of Rapunzel as a narrative of possibility, of the possibility for the healing of wounds and of the formation of a community of equals, where equality implies the absence of patriarchal relations of power.

MY STORY

I don't know how to explain this to you, but I feel that it is important to try. I'm struggling for words because what I want to tell you is somehow new and strange and I'm anxious that the words I already know might inadequately convey my meanings.

I am in an office. It is cool and not bright. The walls are lined with books. It is a place of knowledge. A place for talk. A place of safety. A place where revelation is possible. We are talking, my friend and I, as we often do. Oscillating between theories of everything and narratives of lived experience. Making connections. Negotiating meanings. I am excited and listen to myself say things that I feel unprepared to hear. I am strangely anxious about the place my narrative is taking me. I have some dim sense of the destination, some foreboding. It is a place I want to avoid, yet it is simultaneously seductive, and I am seduced. I can't help myself. Or so it seems. I know I will go there to this place I am anxious about. I am going. Am there now. It is strangely familiar. I have been here before. In this whirling, dizzying vortex where things suddenly become confusingly clear. Illuminated. I am reoriented to the familiar. This is somehow shocking. I am shocked. Last time I was here in this place I re/experienced the subjugation to my father. To his power. His phallus. And now, in this place again, I understand how thoroughly, willingly, I subjugate myself to all the fathers, their phallogentric language. Their knowledge, their meaning, their reality. Their definition of me as other, deviant, bad, wrong, sinner, pervert, evil, criminal, aberration. And I believed them. I took these things for granted. Embedded myself so deeply, inscribed myself so thoroughly, internalised them so successfully that I took them to be true. I deferred to their desire to name me, define me, confine me. Render me less powerful. Powerless. Invisibly. Invisible that is, until now. This moment. This painful, shockingly beautiful moment.

I am in an office. It is cool and not bright. I am saying things. I am saying that the subject is constructed. That the subject is constructed within a patriarchal, heterosexual, phallogentric, paradigm. I am saying that this paradigm constructs difference as deviance. As other in a binary universe. Where other means inferior. I am saying that the category or subject position 'homosexual' is a social construction. I am saying that I am socially

constructed. Made. That somehow my homosexuality, my otherness, my inferiority is constructed. A fiction. A lie. A betrayal in which I am complicit. I am engulfed now by an overwhelming sense of shame. It is somehow appalling that I have chosen, willingly taken up, this reviled position. A wrong turn. An act of stupidity. For the first time I experience thoroughly, completely, full-consciously, the learned shame that my inscription carries. In the same moment that I experience its crushing weight I see the irony. Understand the joke. All positions are constructed. None necessarily more true, right, real or sovereign than any other. Each an illusion. All a fiction. I feel somehow lighter. Freer. Free. I can begin again. Reimagine the terms of my own inscription. Reinscribe myself in my own terms. I can rename myself. Reclaim that which has been variously given up, taken or withheld from me. The courage and dignity to be visible, to be bold and to speak as if I matter.

I have come to believe that I have made choices about who I am and how I behave. I have come to understand that in defining myself as homosexual I have taken up a range of discourses, metaphors and stereotypes associated with that subject position, and taken them up as my own. Whilst I recognise that these choices have been produced within a historical/political/social context that has made a particular range of discursive positions available to me, I want to acknowledge my own complicity in taking up the negative associations and pejorative meanings as if they described me in some real, true and accurate way. I carried these meanings with me and they shaped my sense of self and my relationships with others, especially men. In the company of men I took up, without coercion or resistance, a subordinated position. I inscribed myself as smaller, weaker, younger, uglier and less intelligent. In this way I signalled that I knew my place and in so doing did not compete with the other masculinities I encountered. Never did I consider myself equal. I was always inferior, always powerless, always vulnerable. I was quiet, deferential and hopefully invisible. This was the safest position I had learned was open to me. It was with women that I felt more comfortable, safe and equal. This subtly informed the terms of my inscription as feminine, as somehow lacking an appropriate masculinity.

I conceptualise this now as a betrayal of self, as self-betrayal. I betrayed myself by taking up positions which situated me as vulnerable, powerless and inadequate, and actively refused or avoided any position that conferred anything that might be defined as positive. I consistently censored and manipulated my perceptions, experiences and actions in ways that reflected and confirmed my inadequacy. Trapped in a binary universe I consistently confined myself to the negative polarity, believing that I was, in some fundamental way, a failure, an aberration, that which was expressly not positive. I have come to understand that this self-regulation is made possible by the ideological construction of those discourses and discursive practices to which I and other social subjects are subjected. I conceptualise this as a structural/institutional/social/ ideological betrayal which imposes false, limited and dichotomised choices upon a potentially more diverse and polyvalent social arena. This betrayal emphasises essential, fixed, natural, normal and individual human identities; assumes empirical, linear causality; promotes conformity, punishment and self-regulation; and pathologises difference.

In attempting, in what follows, to unmask these betrayals, I consider the relationship between social context, subjectivity and agency. In so doing I

hope to open spaces for the production of new fictive narratives and possible performances beyond those currently available. Having had my familiar disrupted I am exploring the transformative possibilities of disrupting the familiar of others.

OUR STORY

Personal context

Critical theory springs from an assumption that we live amid a world of pain, that much can be done to alleviate that pain, and that theory has a crucial role to play in that process.

(Poster, 1989, p.3)

I have written myself to a moment of profound anxiety, a moment I have simultaneously struggled to reach and avoid. The preceding theoretical reflections have brought me to this moment of painful reflection on my own investments in particular subject positions. Consideration of sex and gender as discursively produced is not problematic and I am able to reflect with interest on the ways I have consciously, even comfortably, taken up a sometimes oppositional subject position in relation to hegemonic masculinity. I have variously inscribed myself with characteristics more often associated with feminine subject positions, and derived some satisfaction from doing so. Yet, in contradiction to this, my homosexuality is less comfortably situated, especially as it is situated intimately, somehow irrevocably, within the experience of abuse, pain, humiliation and powerlessness that lay at the heart of this matter of my sexuality. Here I understand that discourses of deviance, crime and immorality have created a not always conscious, but ever present, personal and cultural anxiety. I am not here engaged in any struggle between understanding my homosexuality as a biological given, a social construct or a personal choice. Rather I am arguing in favour of a discursive social construction, and yet it seems somehow perverse or ridiculous that I have taken up a subject position that is so problematic within patriarchal culture.

More than anything else it is my sexuality that positions me as other in patriarchal culture. This otherness constitutes the position from which I construct my subject position, my knowledge, truth and reality. This location as ex-centric (Lather, 1991, p.33) affords me a different view, a different opportunity for speculation about the possibilities for the construction of counter-hegemonic knowledges and subject positions.

To challenge canons, to expose systems of power which authorise some representations while blocking others - this has been the task of the uprising of the marginalised, the silenced, the ex-centrics.

(Lather, 1991, p.33)

It is this understanding of my homosexuality as an ex-centric location, and of myself as occupying an ex-centric space within patriarchal culture, ideology and discourse, that I put at the centre of my attempt to understand the relationship between my sexed/gendered/sexualised subjectivity and my commitment to see things differently, to disrupt the familiar. I thus recast my otherness, my marginality, as a space of freedom from within which I am empowered to see, think, feel and act differently.

I am engaged, in this chapter, in reflecting on how subject positions are made available and taken up within certain historical/political/social contexts; with the implications of these positions for lived experience within culture; and with the opportunities for personal and social transformation which ascribe the function of agency to the subject. My engagement with the concept of agency informs my understanding that I have made choices, consciously or otherwise; it also allows me the means through which I may be empowered to make different, conscious, intentional, motivated choices.

I propose then, a subject that is neither wholly determined nor wholly autonomous, neither wholly constituted or explicable in, through or by theories of biology, society, agency or discourse. I recognise that each of these locations are discursively produced and capable of contestation, critique and deconstruction. Further they are each only capable of producing particular, limited sets of meanings and knowledges. What I am proposing is a subject articulated in terms of a dialectical relationship between these locations. In seeking spaces of freedom, sites of transformation, possibilities for transgression, I speak/write from those locations I find most useful to my project of intervention and invention, in/ter/vention (Grosz, 1988, p.92). Whilst I recognise the transformative possibilities of the body, for example hormone therapy and transgender surgery, and the ways in which these might both disrupt the boundaries and shift the collective social meanings and parameters of the physical body, it is within the relationship between society, discourse and agency that I locate the transformative possibilities I seek.

I am trying to make connections here between the subject, meaning and power as expressed through discursive social structures and practices. The resulting reflections, articulations and meanings about the subject are admittedly representative, interpretive and abstracted, but none the less motivated toward conceptualising the possibilities for action available to the subject.

Before you can set about changing the world, you need to define it in such a way that changes are possible. You do this by conceiving it not as a physical essence (a bundle of atoms held together by gravity) but as a social system (a bundle of categories held together by custom).

(Ruthven, 1990, p.36)

Social Context

We habitually think of the social as less real than the biological, what changes as less real than what stays the same. But there is a colossal reality to history. It is the modality of human life, precisely what defines us as human. No other species produces and lives in history, replacing organic evolution with radically new determinants of change.

(Connell, 1995, p.81)

For Connell this recognition of subject positions as historically variable does not suggest that they are flimsy or trivial. Rather it locates them firmly in the world of social agency where subject positions are formed and transformed over time (Connell, 1995, pp.81-82).

For Pile and Thrift (1995) the social domain consists of a set of relational configurations between positions which are based on certain forms of power, where 'each field prescribes its own particular values and possesses its own regulative principles which agents struggle to change or preserve' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.31).

I recognise that this relational set of configurations coheres around sets of positions, categories and assumptions through which the materiality of social subjects is established, stabilised and constantly reproduced. These categories establish meanings, knowledges and boundaries within which discourses of the real and the natural are generated. These real, natural, material social subjects are rendered visible and meaningful in terms of categories such as class, race, socio-economic status, religion, sex, gender and sexuality. These categories are produced and reproduced within specific historical/political/social contexts, and within patriarchy are understood as meaningful within relations of power. As argued earlier in this text these relations of power are hierarchical, dualistic and oppositional, where difference is expressed in terms of dominance and subordination. This concept of difference is understood to be located in discourses which establish, sustain and justify the hegemony of the dominant group. In this text I am foregrounding the discursive categories sex, gender and sexuality as the locus for the inscription of both the individual and the social body, especially in terms of difference and power.

Like Bacchi (1990) my principal concern is not with an exploration of the natures of women and men nor of the differences between them. I do not attempt to resolve the question of whether anatomy is destiny, nor resolve the nature/nurture, biology/culture debate. Rather, I am concerned with the processes through which ideas about sexual difference shape social theory and practice, through which knowledge is acquired and gendered subjectivities produced and reproduced. Like Davies (1989) I take the view that

It is not yet possible to prove that we are simply biologically or socially determined. Rather, a subtle, complex, irreducible and inseparable relationship between physiology and environment is suggested.

(Davies, 1989, p.10)

Like Coward (1983), Davies (1989) and Segal (1990) I argue that the nature/nurture, biology/culture, framework is conceptually inadequate. Human action and experience are not read as the simple addition or mix of biological and social components: rather, 'the one already contains the other' (Segal, 1990, p.64). Whilst biology, as discursive constructions of meaning and knowledge about the body, is understood to affect culture, these effects are recognised as being historically and culturally variable: 'What becomes of our bodies has a history determined by human action' (Segal, 1990, p.64). In this way biology cannot be specified independently of culture. Rather, biological facts gain the power to shape human behaviour through the meanings given to them in particular historical/political/social contexts. I argue that human behaviours, bodies, desires, thoughts, beliefs and practices are thus influenced by social contexts and the ideologies, discourses, meanings and values produced within them. Like Coward (1983) I recognise that any transformation of sexual relations in society will depend on the displacement of dominant ways of thinking about them and that such displacement will have radical implications for our understanding of both the subject and society.

Connell (1991) notes that for many people the notion of natural sex difference 'forms a limit beyond which thought cannot go' (Connell, 1991, p.66). Connell argues that doctrines of natural difference are fundamentally mistaken. He challenges the assumption that the biological/ reproductive make-up of our bodies is the foundation or essence of lived social relations. Rather, the social gender order is understood as 'a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women, and definitions of

femininity and masculinity' (Connell, 1991, p.98). Thus the categories 'man' and 'woman' are socially constructed and 'achieved through practices which assert the solidarity of the categories' (Connell, 1991, p.81). This socially constructed solidarity is construction and invention, 'a new fact' (Connell, 1991, p.81) in no way implied by biology. To interpret social relations as natural or inevitable is to deny their historicity and to do that is to 'close off the possibility of human practice recreating humanity' (Connell, 1991 p.245). Given that the categories man/male/masculine and woman/female/feminine are variably, historically constructed, it is possible for new conceptualisations of gender to emerge. Thus the boundaries of gendered subjectivity can be contested and remade; masculinities and femininities can be reconstructed. Such reconstruction will involve critical reflection, re-examination and redefinition of the relationship between the social and biological in the construction of subjectivity.

For Segal (1991) the biological/social divide is misleading. She asserts that we can only experience, describe and understand bodily states within specific social contexts, employing the cultural meanings available to us. Coward (1983) contends that men and women have historically been seen as radically distinct groups, with different sexual identities and interests. These interests, seen as different and complementary, are combined and positioned as central to the practice of marriage and reproduction. In recognising this as 'the practice on which all civilisation rests' (Coward, 1983, p.254), Coward acknowledges that the heterosexual reproductive couple is the paradigm for male and female subjectivities and relationships. Subjectivities are thus acquired through social relationships and the acquisition of a social position.

Like Davies (1989) I recognise that individuals do not, and cannot, float free from social structures. Whilst individuals may choose to contest or transform these structures, their actions, individual or collective, are always constrained by the structures within which they are located. These structures

provide the conceptual framework, the psychic patterns, the emotions through which individuals position themselves in relation to the social world ... Masculinity and femininity are not inherent properties of individuals, then, they are inherent or structural properties of our society that is, they both condition and arise from social action.

(Davies, 1989, p.13)

Thus I assert that femininities and masculinities are made; they are fictions, inventions, myths, metaphors and constructions. As constructions

they can be deconstructed and reconstructed. Davies (1993) defines her task as one of 'disrupting the apparent inevitability of the male-female dualism' (Davies 1993, p.ix). In so doing she hopes to open up the possibility of multiple, fluid, gender categories, where individuals are free to 'move in and out of a range of ways of being which were not limited by the dualistic categories of maleness and femaleness' (Davies, 1993, p.ix). In this way women and men would be free to take up a wider range of possible subject positions, positions which would break the associations between; maleness, power, autonomy and aggression; femaleness, nurturance, dependence and passivity; gayness and effeminacy; lesbianism and mannishness.

Davies (1989) suggests that sex and gender are elements of social structures created by, and within, individuals as they learn the discursive practices through which those structures are created and maintained. Social structures then are not separate from the individuals who construct or inhabit them. Though social structures have a material force they cannot be imposed on individuals. Rather they are actively taken up and provide the means through which individual subject positions may be legitimated, contested, subverted or transformed. Any challenge to existing discourses of sex/gender/sexuality thus involves a struggle with personal/subjective and social/cultural constraints.

This text represents my struggle to confront and disrupt ideas of femaleness and maleness which underpin patriarchal subject positions and sexual relations. I understand feminine and masculine subject positions to be constructed on the basis of female and male genital sex and reproductive capacity. Yet, like Davies (1989, 1993, 1994), I assert that these do not have any necessary implications for the subjectivity or subject positionings that any individual can take up. As understood by Davies, poststructuralist feminist theory assumes that femaleness and maleness do not have to be, or continue to be, structured in the way they currently are. The individual is seen as a shifting nexus of possibilities rather than a 'unitary unproblematically sexed being' (Davies, 1989, p.12). In a world not constructed on the basis of a male/female dualism, these possibilities would not be limited by reproductive sexual capacity, but rather, would be opened up to a range of multiple, possible positions that each individual would be capable of, or interested in, taking up. It is this territory of the possible that I seek to explore, that as writing/speaking subject I may write/speak the possibility of alternative subject positions beyond those already available.

Subjectivity

The subject ... is an assemblage which is constantly breaking down, leaking in all directions ... But is also a site for endless experimentation, complication and invention; a site that is only ever actualised as the singularity of the context in which it is produced as a recording surface.

(Doel, 1995, p.232)

The reconstruction of the subject in terms of a proliferation of possibilities is recognised by Eagleton (1996) to be founded on three principles: the idea of shifting, reformulated identities; the critique of dualistic thinking; and the political importance of discourse and language (Eagleton, 1996, p.347). The political importance of language and discourse has been discussed in a previous chapter; the critique of dualistic thinking is undertaken in the next chapter; and an exploration of the idea of shifting, reformulated identities is foregrounded in this chapter.

Of the many available, or possible, meanings about subjectivity, the subject, subject positions and subjectification, I want to focus on three interrelated presuppositions. First, the subject is understood to be a knowing agent, 'an entity aware of itself and of a wider world' (Rose, 1995, p.249), who has the power to act upon that knowledge and the world. Second, the subject is in part defined by that world, or in relation to that world, and is located in specific historical/political/social contexts. Third, the notion of the subject suggests the exercise of power and subjection to that power. A subject may exercise power over other subjects or objects, or experience the exercise of power over them by others. Poststructuralist feminist theory locates subjectivity in terms of both relations of power as they constitute identity and efforts to elude those relations (Davies, 1989; Rose, 1995; Weedon, 1991).

Like Rose (1995) I am looking for a way of thinking about subjectivity that offers a view of the subject as complex and contradictory. This stress on contradiction and complexity is a strategic location which attempts to avoid essentialism, universalism and exclusion. If the subject is 'no longer innocent but problematic' (Rose, 1995, p.233), then so too are the knowledges in which the subject is embedded and through which the subject is constructed.

The effort to think through a subject position in terms of difference, contradiction and instability is connected to the effort to situate the production of knowledge, including knowledge about the subject, in a highly complex, shifting and power-ridden world, and to render any action on the basis of such knowledge both accountable to a specific position and vulnerable to other interpretations.

(Rose, 1995, p.233)

Subjectivity and social context

Locating the subject in a patriarchal context recognises that subjectivity is contingent on the relations of power in which subjects are placed. In so doing I am arguing that any sense of being an individual is an effect of these relations. In positioning this discussion as a political project I am attempting to intervene in these relations of power/knowledge by redefining subjectivity. Thus, as well as being the result of political struggles, this redefined notion of subjectivity is political in that in/ter/vention in the power/knowledge nexus aims to reconstitute the subject in relational terms (Rose, 1995). What I am attempting to do is articulate and explore a subjectivity that is relational, embodied, sees difference as 'qualitative multiplicity' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.17) and which is capable of providing new and empowering speaking/writing positions. In constructing more open configurations of the subject I am moving towards the creation of new sites and possibilities for action and subject constitution which elude, and elide, relations of power and domination. I am trying to evoke a sense of the subject as a subject in process, in the process of becoming, as a process of provisional and open ended movement. I am thus attempting to resist and disrupt the fixed meanings through which I have learned to inscribe myself, and am seeking alternative meanings and new possibilities for inhabiting, experiencing and expressing my body, my sexuality, my thoughts and feelings, and my relationships.

The subject, as understood in this text, is concerned with 'concepts of what it means to be called, or name oneself, 'a woman' or 'a man' ' (Eagleton, 1996, p.339) and the ways in which this is linked with the concept of collective subjects, 'women' and 'men'. From a poststructuralist feminist position the individual or collective subject is not fixed or immutable. Rather the subject, as always a subject in process, is understood to be 'incomplete, always becoming, never stable' (Eagleton, 1996, p.340).

Yet, to function, the subject requires some sense of stability. From a poststructuralist feminist perspective this stability is an illusion, but one that is necessary for the maintenance of everyday living. Thus the subject is in some sense changeable and unstable, yet in another, gives the illusion that it is fixed, solid and dependable (Pile & Thrift, 1995). My purpose in exploring subjectivity is to locate, or imagine, new spaces, new politics and new possibilities.

I do not conceptualise the subject as a powerless victim of controlling social forces, but rather understand that the subject is simultaneously subjected to social structures, practices and formations, and able to choose from, adopt or take up particular positions, or versions of positions, available to them within that structure. Ironically, some of these positions confer different status and power on the subject, and may not always be in their interest. What I am interested in, then, is the relationship between social structures and agency in the formulation of subject positions.

What I am arguing for, and seeking out, is a theoretical position that acknowledges that subjects can act upon the world as partially autonomous agents. This position is critical to the emphasis on change and transformation, in terms of conscious, intentional and motivated action, that is central to the formulation of this text. What I am arguing is that the subject is socially constructed in language and discourse and not the product of a natural self, which is prior to, or outside, the social. The subject is a collective subject, constructed through relationships between ideologies, discourses, social structures and practices and other social subjects. Bell and Valentine, (1995:149) in emphasising discourse over essence, also emphasise the principle of relatedness, where the 'you' and 'I' are transformed into 'us'. In so doing they capture the sense of the subject as constituted relationally in terms of a collective social context. The subject thus assumes an identity on the basis of commonality with others and yet simultaneously assumes that they are a unique individual (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.39).

The subjection of the subject is instituted through the inscription of meaning and power through the never merely physical body: mastery, mind, skin, class, sexuality are systematically mapped onto the body of the same/other. The body becomes a point of capture, where the dense meanings of power are animated, where cultural codes gain their apparent coherence and where boundaries between the same and the other are installed and naturalised.

(Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.41)

Yet the performance of these animated subject positions is not always comfortable, confident or convincing. Indeed there are moments when subjects are 'not sure how to behave, or what other people think of them, or where people suddenly feel self conscious, or alienated' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.49). This sense of nervous performance, of vulnerable inscription, suggests a precarious fictional subject position, 'a fiction which must continually be established as truth' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.49).

Nowadays, the subject and subjectivity are more likely to be conceived of as rooted in the spatial home of the body, and therefore situated, as composed of and by a 'federation' of different discourses/persona, united and orchestrated to a greater or lesser extent by narrative.

(Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.11)

The subject, as a narrative construct, is thus understood to be a fiction with no essential characteristics, a text, always in the process of being spoken/written in different discursive arenas. Thus, like Doel, (1995) I recognise that the production of the subject is never complete. It is always 'a work-in-progress' (Doel, 1995, p.230) and a site of continuous experimentation. Hence the subject is always 'a body *to come*'; it endures without ever existing *as such* ' (Doel, 1995, p.230). Being is redefined in terms of becoming, where becoming 'begins as a desire to escape bodily limitation' (Doel, 1995, p.230). The subject is thus variable and involved in a process of continuous modification, understood as neither universal nor individual, but as 'a virtual multiplicity' (Doel, 1995, p.235).

Multiple subjects

This view of the subject informs my understanding of myself, other subjects and the contexts within which we are situated. For Bonner (1992) this location or situation is described in terms of position. Positionality refers to 'the individual's viewpoint, as influenced by such factors as gender, age, race, class and sexual orientation' (Bonner et al, 1992, p.7). The subject develops a particular perspective depending on how they are positioned in these terms. Yet, that subject may have more than one perspective, and it is in this sense that the subject may be understood as multiple, not singular.

To view the human subject as socially constructed, multiple and 'devoid of determining universal characteristics' (Gatens, 1991 p.98), is to view its possibilities as open-ended. This does not deny that the subject is constrained by 'historical context or by rudimentary biological facts' (Gatens, 1991, p.98) but rather, suggests that these factors set the outer parameters of possibility only. There exists within these constraints, multiple possibilities. Though my male body is not capable of conception and childbirth it does not follow that I am incapable of nurturing children nor embodying any of the qualities usually associated with nurturance; gentleness, tenderness, patience, kindness, selflessness and so on. The limits of my maleness are thus not

simply determined by my biology but are also limited by the meanings associated with my male body. New meanings thus admit new possibilities and it is these new meanings and possibilities that I am struggling to conceptualise, that I may be empowered to reinscribe myself.

Within poststructuralist feminist theory the concept of subjectivity replaces the concept of an essential, authentic self. Subjectivity is understood to be culturally and socially shaped and constantly shifting according to changing historical conditions and the dominant ideological/discursive frameworks within which it is formed. Instead of a single, unchanging self that is waiting to be revealed 'poststructuralism decentres the traditional self and introduces the possibility of multiple selves, much more fragmented and contradictory in make-up being socially formed within changing conditions, relations and frameworks' (Jackson, 1990, p.40).

Subjectivity and discourse

Subjectivity is constructed through a continuous process of personal engagement in the discourses, institutions and practices that construct meaning and ascribe value to the lived experience of the subject and the world view or reality constructed by them.

(Bartky, 1990, p.118)

This perspective makes visible both the process through which subjects are 'caught up in structures and storylines that constitute them as who they are and who they each might be' (Davies, 1994, p.76) and the processes of subjectification, where the subject 'takes up the discourses through which they and others speak/write the world into existence as if they were their own' (Davies, 1993, p.13). In this way the concept of subjectification makes visible the coercive and constitutive power of discourses through which subjects actively construct their own subjectivity.

Like Davies (1994) and Jackson (1990) I recognise that subjectivity is constructed on the basis of a particular life history and experience of being in the world. Yet both this experience of that life history and how it is told, are the result of 'intersections of discourses, storylines and relations of power' (Davies, 1994, p.3). In this sense I am a fiction and this text is my history. It is brought to the page through language, made possible through discourse and expressed through narrative forms that locate myself at the heart of the story. In simultaneously reflecting on the processes through which subjectivity is

constructed and the constitutive force of discourse, I am exploring the ways in which all social subjects are constructed through much the same discourses in much the same ways.

The detailed ways in which any one person experiences being a person can be examined, not just to see what the specificity of that person is, but to see the common threads through which, being a person, or being male or female, or white or black is accomplished.

(Davies, 1994, p.3)

Subjectivity and change

As understood by Weedon (1991) subjectivity refers to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, their sense of themselves and the ways in which they understand their relation to the world. In this way the concept of subjectivity captures both the notion of people as intentional subjects and as subject to forces beyond their control. In attempting to politicise the concept of subjectivity I am emphasising a subjectivity that is conscious and wilful, emphasising also the possibilities for imagining, affirming and enacting different subjectivities and subject positions. Faust (1991) recognises that this view opens both subjectivity and consciousness to the possibility of change. 'Changes in the objective conditions of life cannot succeed unless consciousness is also changed' (Faust, 1991, p.224).

Gatens (1991) asserts that feminist critical theory aims to come to some understanding of how culture employs and privileges certain categories of thought and the relation these categories have to contemporary understandings of sexual difference. This requires critical reflection on, and analysis of, how these categories result in the production of different subjectivities, in terms of roles, desires, thoughts, behaviours, feelings, identities and so on, for female and male subjects. It also requires reflection on the different values attached to those subjectivities and the ways in which these values are embedded in, and reproduced by, social institutions and practices. Davies (1994) acknowledges that 'by making hegemonic sets of assumptions visible, the nature of what we take to be factual or real is profoundly shifted' (Davies, 1994, p.20). It is through critique of notions of commonsense that the persistent replication of the hegemonic forms of the dominant culture may be avoided (Seidler, 1991).

Like Thorne (1993) I argue that subjects become invested in particular forms of femininity and masculinity and oppositional gender arrangements based on relations of domination. I am searching, in this text, for points of resistance and opposition, and for the possibility of relationships based on mutuality and reciprocity. Such a search requires both intervention and invention, 'in/ter/vention' (Grosz, 1988, p.92) that we may imagine, and realise other possibilities. Such possibilities will necessarily contest the hegemony of those discourses and regimes of truth that have influence in shaping both individual and collective identities. Thus both personal and social transformations require a counter-hegemonic logic, theory and practice (Connell, 1994). Such counter-hegemonic practice challenges 'the outer limits of the epistemological horizon where the masculinist logic of the universal subject and its naming of the other is firmly inscribed' (Luke, 1992, p.37). Thus, the gendered structural divisions upon which society, and the social production of subjectivity, reality and knowledge are based, must be theoretically, and practically, contested and transformed.

Braidotti describes this theoretical challenge in terms of a 'politics of location' (Braidotti, 1992, p.185) which aims to explore, contest and remake the boundaries and epistemological parameters of a community of knowing subjects. Such practice is motivated toward a redefinition of the subject through the collective quest for a political critique of sexuality as a social and symbolic system.

What I am arguing here is that there can be no subjectivity outside the processes by which, and the language through which, subjects are ascribed a sex, gender or sexuality. Whilst the subject is always understood in these terms the subject is not 'a nominal essence' (Braidotti 1992, p.185) but merely a convenient fiction, a grammatical necessity which holds together the multiple experiences and structures through which the embodied subject is produced and reproduced. This recognition of the subject as embodied, foregrounds a view of both the subject and the body as located, or positioned, within discourses. Both my genitalia and the absence of breasts confer upon me the status 'male'. In this way my physical body conforms to definitions and discourses of maleness. Yet as much as I am recognisably male, I am less successfully masculine. This is not a function of my biology or physiology, but rather a function of the complex and sometimes contradictory ways in which I inhabit my body, how I use it to perform the subject positions I take up. I choose not to use my body in ways which signal power, dominance or authority, nor any other quality I associate with hegemonic masculinity. My

visible lack of masculinity is taken by some to confirm my homosexuality and my homosexuality taken to confirm my lack of masculinity. Thus I am defined by the sets of discourses through which I inscribe and understand myself and am understood by others.

Given that subjectivity and subject positions are socially constructed through discursive processes, then it follows that present social relations and the subject positions available within them are mutable. The processes and practices through which social subjects are inscribed are thus capable of change, and 'therein lies the possibility of transformation' (Gatens, 1991, p.106). The body then has no fixed character which defines the boundaries of 'possible socio-political structures in which the body could live' (Gatens, 1991, p.138). Rather, it is socio-political structures which define the boundaries of particular kinds of bodies. Thus, both bodies and boundaries are fictions, narratives located in particular historical, political and social contexts which result in the construction of particular bodies. These bodies, as texts, are inscribed by the categories, meanings and boundaries of that context. Bodies then, are the embodiment of particular discourses and discursive practices.

For Braidotti (1992) the redefinition of the subject begins with 'the reevaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity' (Braidotti, 1992, p.182) and a rejection of the traditional vision of the knowing subject as universal, neutral and gender-free. This positional, or situated, way of seeing the subject recognises that the most important location of the subject is in the spatial frame of the body.

The body

Flesh, a raw formless bodily materiality, the mythical primary material, is constituted, through corporeal inscriptions (juridical, medical, punitive, disciplinary), as a distinctive body capable of acting in distinctive ways, performing specific tasks, in socially concrete ways. Bodies are fictionalised, that is, positioned by various cultural (religious, familial, secular, educational etc) narratives and discourses, which are themselves embodiments of canons, norms and representational forms; they are culturally established as living narratives, narratives not always or even usually transparent to themselves.

(Grosz, 1993, p.50)

Rather than viewing the forms and functions of the body as determinant in the organisation of culture, Gatens (1988, p.62) suggests

bodies be viewed as products of the way that culture organises, regulates and remakes itself. This view shifts the conceptual ground from a question of how the body is taken up in culture to a question of how culture constructs the body in such a way that it is understood to be a biological given.

For Grosz (1993) the body is inscribed by the social; flesh is transformed into a body 'organised and hierarchised according to the requirements of a particular social and familial nexus' (Grosz, 1993, p.50). The body is a text, a fiction, a surface inscribed by culture. As a text, the body is fictionalised and positioned within the myths, beliefs, categories, metaphors and stereotypes that form a culture's social narratives and self-representations. From this text, this surface, the culture, within and through which it is written, may be read. For Braidotti (1994) the body is understood in terms of

a complex interplay of highly constituted social and symbolic forces. The body is not an essence, let alone a biological substance. It is a play of forces, a surface of intensities.

(Braidotti, 1994, p.163)

What I want to emphasise here is this notion of embodiment, of the sense of the imaginary and symbolic transformed into materiality in, on, through and by the body.

The body, understood as the embodiment of available subject positions, has been defined as central to the poststructuralist feminist struggle for the redefinition of subjectivity (Braidotti, 1992, 1994; Gatens, 1991; Grosz, 1993). For Braidotti (1992) the body is neither a biological nor sociological category, but rather 'a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological' (Braidotti, 1992, p.184). Thus the body is understood to be 'a surface of signification' situated at the intersection between the 'alleged facticity of anatomy' and the symbolic dimension of language (Braidotti, 1992, p.184). This understanding of the body foregrounds the multiple and complex structures of subjectivity and 'the specifically human capacity' (Braidotti, 1992, p.184) for transcending any given variable, including class, race and sex, whilst remaining situated within them. Of these many variables, patriarchal culture prioritises the production of the sexed body. In so doing, sex, gender and sexuality are given high status among a set of hierarchical variables. The embodied subject is thus situated in a complex web of power relations.

Sexuality as power, that is, as institution, is also a semiotic code that organises our perception of morphological differences between the sexes. It is through the inscription into language that the embodied subject is constructed as a functional, socialised gendered entity.

(Braidotti, 1992, p.185)

The social body

Like Gatens (1991) I am arguing that there is no raw, real or natural body and that sexual differences are always embodied and lived in culture, and always mediated by its ideologies and discourses. I do not assume the existence of an a priori self, but rather understand that bodies are socially and discursively produced as sexed bodies (Gatens 1991, p.100). Subjects then, are understood in terms of embodied, sexed subject positions (Gatens, 1993, p.104). This view shifts the emphasis from nature and biology to the ways in which bodies are encoded, trained and made meaningful within social institutions and practices. For Connell (1995) subjectivity is understood as

A historical process involving the body, not a fixed set of biological determinants. Gender is a social practice that refers to what bodies do, it is not social practice reduced to the body ... Gender exists precisely to the extent that biology does not determine the social. It marks one of those points of transition where the historical process supersedes biological evolution as the form of change.

(Connell, 1995, p.71)

I am not arguing that the body is not in some sense biological, nor that there is no physical body in terms of genes, hormones, chromosomes and so on. What I am arguing is that these terms derive their meanings from discourses and are therefore not seen as having an original, essential substance or referent. I recognise that even within biology, and other physical/medical sciences, there exist competing theories and meanings about the body. I recognise too that biological discourses produce biological knowledges, just as psychoanalytical discourses produce psychoanalytical knowledges, and so on.

Thus, the ways in which we conceptualise the body form and limit its meanings. I am struggling here to articulate an account of the body and its relationship to social life, politics and ethics that does not depend on the hierarchical dualisms and relations of power that characterise patriarchal ideologies and discourses. Such an account does not naturalise difference nor conceptualise it as either dichotomised or polarised. That women and men

have visible physiological sex-specific characteristics is not disputed. Rather, what is disputed is the ways in which these differences are interpreted, and the social implications of these differences in terms of lived experience and relations of power.

The body then, is understood as an interplay of forces, structures and practices which generate various knowledges/truths depending on how they are discursively located. The body, as discursively located and constituted in patriarchal culture, is a sexed, gendered, sexualised body, and constructed in terms of binary oppositions; man/woman, male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual.

Like Crowley and Himmelweit (1992) I stress that denial of biological determinism does not simply mean that the social construction of the subject is emphasised and the body denied altogether.

We have to find ways of bringing biological bodies back into our theorising. Bodies are social too, and our experience of, and engagement with, a gendered world is as embodied persons. Surely those bodies, and their (often messy) processes, must be part of any continuing construction of gender?

(Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992, p.76)

Crowley & Himmelweit (1992) propose a transformative account of human development that allows movement beyond either/or thinking and which sees bodies as part of the social context. Ideas about subjectivity and human development may then be freed to move beyond those temporal dichotomies and additive viewpoints which separate the social from the biological, and which account for development as biology first and social experience second.

In exploring this relationship between the biological and the social Grosz (1990), distinguishes anatomical differences between the sexes from the ways in which sexed bodies are culturally classified. She asserts that differences between bodies are greater than admitted by a binary classification, yet are subject to categorisation according to binary pairs 'which reduce ambiguous terms not amenable to binary hierarchisation, back into this polarised structure' (Grosz, 1990, p.73). Thus the limitations of the social and signifying systems which determine the conceptualisation/categorisation of gender, limit the possible ways of perceiving, understanding and living in sexed bodies. The body is thus bound by conceptual categories and the discourses through which they are manifest, of which biology itself is one.

The procedures which mark male and female bodies ensure that biological capacities of bodies are always socially coded into sexually distinct categories.

(Grosz, 1990, p.73)

Emphasising a non-essential and non-dichotomised view of the body foregrounds its cultural and historical specificity. Gatens (1988) argues that alternative points-of-view of the body need to address the connections between representations of sexed bodies, and the social, political and ethical frameworks through which those representations are made.

Sexing the body

Diprose (1993) recognises that the body is a social structure comprised of multiple drives and emotions that are socially constructed. She describes the subject as the social constitution of embodied subject positions. Subjectivity is thus 'determined by the concepts which govern the structure of the social world and which sculpture the body accordingly' (Diprose, 1993, p.3). The body, as a construction, social structure or artefact, is organised and unified through social concepts. In patriarchal culture the embodied self is frozen into particular configurations based on genital sex and is 'constituted by social concepts which discourage difference, creativity and change' (Diprose, 1993, p.4). The body, as cultural artefact, is thus produced through the exclusion of other possibilities for an embodied place in the world. Such conforming bodies act out, or perform, the social roles available to them within the cultural repertoire.

In learning the discursive practices we learn the categories, the relations between categories, and the fine conceptual and interactive detail with which we take up our personhood, and with which to interpret who we are in relation to others. Positioning oneself as person within the terms made available within a particular social order also creates and sustains that social order.

(Davies, 1989, p.14)

Yet positioning oneself as female or male is not simply a conceptual process, it is also a physical process. Each body takes on the knowledge of femaleness or maleness through its practices (Davies, 1989).

The body as used, the body I am, is a social body that has taken meanings rather than conferred them. My male body does not confer masculinity on me; it receives masculinity (or some fragment thereof) as a social definition. Nor is my sexuality the eruption of the natural; it too is part of a social process. In the most extraordinary detail, my body's responses reflect back, like the little mirrors on an Indian dress, a kaleidoscope of social meanings. The body, without ceasing to be the body, is taken in hand and transformed in social practice.

(Connell, 1991, p.83)

Connell (1991) acknowledges that the body not only takes its identity from, and through, ideology and symbolism but also from, and through, the material effects of the social structure of gender. 'Through the organisation and regulation of the time, space and movements of our daily lives, our bodies are trained, shaped and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity and femininity' (Bordo 1990, p.14). Over time, these trained shaped bodies change as a result of social purposes and social struggle: 'That is to say they are fully historical' (Connell, 1991, p.87).

The process of bodily inscription thus proceeds from the idea to the reality. What one is able to be/come is constrained by the idea of what one can/might be. Thus the way in which we discursively position ourselves as male or female is reflected in our physical being. We embody the idea we have of ourselves. Our understanding of the body as able to do some things and not others not only effects the shape, meaning and activity of the body, but also its relationship to others and its environment. Thus the idea and enactment of sex/gender has a material effect on the body. 'One's sex is thus inscribed in one's body through the activities associated with one's ascribed sex' (Davies, 1989, p.17). Davies acknowledges that having taken on the bodily, emotional and cognitive patterns with which the body is both inscribed and ascribed, it becomes difficult to imagine any alternative to the given social structure. Consensual social reality fossilises around the apparent facticity of two opposite sex/genders. Any behaviours, thoughts and emotions which cross the boundaries of this binary construction of 'true femaleness' and 'true maleness' signify incompetence, inadequacy or immorality, and incur a range of social sanctions. The boundaries of appropriate behaviour constitute a regime of truth which is policed and regulated both by coercion and complicity, power and desire. Porter (1991) suggests that 'any conclusion that accommodation to constructed gender roles and stereotypes is natural, biological or inevitable misses the complexity of the issue' (Porter, 1991, p.31). Rather, given narrow and inhibitory either/or choices, individuals

develop selected traits and suppress their perceived opposites. As much as I choose not to inscribe myself as masculine, I choose not to inscribe myself as female. Thus whilst I might take up some positions more usually associated with femininity, gentleness, nurturance, domesticity and so on, I reject inscriptions more usually associated with being female, make-up, hairstyle, dresses, stockings and so on. Despite the apparent complexity and contradiction in this, the choices I make and the positions I take up are still informed by oppositional either/or choices of the sort involved in more conventional male/female, masculine/feminine inscriptions.

In this way multiple possibilities are reduced to a two fold choice. Further, this binary structure reduces one term of the pair to a definitional dependence on the other, creating a hierarchy where one term is defined as the absence, lack or negation of the other. Defined in these terms the subject is encoded in power laden regulatory practices which are inscribed on both the individual and social body.

Mobile bodies, changeable performances

For Grosz (1994) the inscription of the social surface of the body is a tracing of pedagogical, juridical, medical and economic discourses, texts, laws and practices onto the flesh, to 'carve out a social subject' (Grosz, 1994, p.117). However these surface inscriptions are not merely superficial; rather, they generate and produce 'all the effects of a psychical interior, an underlying depth, individuality or consciousness' (Grosz, 1994, p.116) and are understood as a 'series of flows, energies, movements, strata, segments, organs, intensities - fragments capable of being linked together or severed in potentially infinite ways other than those which congeal them into identities' (Grosz, 1994, p.167). Given that bodies and subjectivities are in constant movement and action, in the constant process of becoming, and always made not found, then these fluid, multiple, made bodies and subjectivities can be remade. The body, as the subject of knowledge, is thus mobile, open to refiguration, and subject to refigured knowledge.

Such a reading of the body locates an articulation of the possibilities for change within theories and practices that emphasise mobility, flexibility and the possibility of conscious, motivated, intentional action. What I want to emphasise here is the possibility of transformation, where subjectivity is

understood as a discursive regulatory fiction embodied and performed by the subject, where there are ever present, if invisible, opportunities for different performances.

For Diprose (1993) the body is a cultural artefact, a body which conforms to, and performs, the social roles imposed upon it. Subject positions are thus taken up through 'a process of self-fabrication with the artistic ability to stage, watch and overcome the self according to a self given plan' (Diprose, 1993, p.5). Diprose recognises that the project of creating an image of the subject beyond its present form and interpretation requires a view at a distance from, or outside, the frameworks and boundaries within which subjects are currently constituted. Critical reflection which connects theory and action is thus central to transforming consciousness, embodiment, social practice, knowledge and reality. Critical reflection involves both self and social analysis and is an intentional practice. The subject is thus understood as an active agent, able to effect the ways in which their subjectivity is embodied, represented and understood. Thus, as agent, the subject is positioned as complicit in the construction of identity, whether consciously or not. The aim of critical reflection is to bring to consciousness both the conditions of the constructed nature of the subject, and the means by which this construction may be contested and transformed. This is motivated toward 'the emergence of people who ... are conscious of themselves as active and deciding beings, who bear responsibility for their choices and who are able to explain them in terms of their own freely adopted purposes and ideals' (Fay, 1987, p.74).

Theorising the performativity of the subject offers possibilities for doing the performance differently. When we speak/write ourselves within theoretical contexts which challenge the coherence of the patriarchal subject, the subject is opened up, and this move into theory makes the creation of other subject positions possible. In this way the notion of a stable identity is destabilised and radical new spaces for subjectivities 'freed from rigid binarisms and cultural matrices' (Bell & Valentine, 1995, p.157) are opened up. The binarisms and cultural matrices that make the performance of the subject possible, and culturally intelligible, are constructed in terms of the categories sex, gender and sexuality. The performing body, as culturally produced, is thus always sexed, gendered and sexualised, embodying the discourses that it is presumed to reflect.

Sex, gender and sexuality

I have argued throughout this text that meaning, value, knowledge, reality and truth are ideological, discursive, linguistic, contextual and relational constructions. What I am interested in exploring here is how normative, prescriptive subject positions are produced, made available and taken up by the subject. I am also interested in how these positions come to be taken as natural, normal and necessary.

Here, normality is understood in terms of culturally appropriate, and culturally endorsed, sexed, gendered and sexualised subjectivities. These subjectivities are understood to be discursively produced, their meanings variable according to the discursive contexts in which they are articulated and constantly produced and reproduced. I recognise that in particular historical/political/social contexts certain discourses attain hegemony over others and that this hegemony is a constant site of contest and struggle. These hegemonic discourses are therefore open to disruption and transformation. I am interested in the meanings that discourses of sex, gender and sexuality accrue, and am interested in the possibilities for contesting, disrupting and transforming them. I argue that the discursive categories sex, gender and sexuality are projected, or written, on the body as if real, and once embodied, seem to have their reality confirmed.

Like Thorne (1993) I am arguing that gendered meanings are deeply embedded in many of the discourses we draw on to make sense of the world. Thus, differences between the sexes are often not so much based on externally observable behaviour, but on the 'symbolic dimension of experience' (Thorne, 1993, p.105) in terms of patterns of meaning, stereotypes, beliefs, ideologies, metaphors and discourses. Like Walkerdine I argue that femininity and masculinity are powerful fictions, imbued with fantasy and lived as fact (1990, p.xiii).

In exploring the fictive nature of the subject I interrogate lived experience as simultaneously real, imaginary and symbolic. In emphasising subjectivity as the performance of regulatory fictions I want to unmask the processes whereby symbolic meanings, in this case sex, gender and sexuality, are projected, inscribed or conferred on the body. I want also to explore spaces of freedom, or possibility, in which patriarchal discourses of sex, gender and sexuality are rendered meaningless, a space in which subjectivity, subject positions and subjects are opened to a play of possibility where

neither the genitals or the reproductive functions of bodies, nor patriarchal ideologies or discourses, determine the limits of available, or possible, subject positions. I want to imagine something altogether different, an elsewhere, where difference proliferates beyond the current hierarchical binary oppositions within which patriarchal subjects are inscribed. Like Cream (1995) I recognise that anatomical and physiological narratives are embodied within cultural values about how the sexes should be ordered as well as the roles and spaces they are expected to inhabit (Cream, 1995, p.1162).

In recognising this I want to explore the ways in which bodies are made culturally intelligible. For Butler (1990) intelligible subject positions are those which in some sense 'institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among, sex, gender, sexual practice and desire' (Butler, 1990, p.17). These intelligible subject positions are understood as performed by the subject and this performance is understood to constitute, and be constituted by, sexed, gendered and sexualised subjectivities and relations among subjects. Thus there could be no sexed, gendered or sexualised body if there were no discourses to make that body culturally intelligible; 'This is not to say that there would be no bodies, but they would mean something different' (Cream, 1995, p.162). In this way the assumed mimetic relationship between bodies and behaviour, between sex, gender and sexuality, man/male/masculine/heterosexual and woman/female/feminine/heterosexual would be disrupted, and once disrupted their discursively produced meanings would be opened to the possibility of revision. My male body and my homosexuality would then confer upon me a different set of meanings than those through which I am currently constructed and understood. Indeed I may cease to be intelligible as either 'male' or 'homosexual'.

Sex, gender, sexuality and discourse

My point is that each of the categories sex, gender and sexuality, and their analysis, are discursive. Thus, whether sex, gender and sexuality are fixed or free is a function of the particular discourses through which they are articulated and which set the limits to analysis. For Butler (1990) the body is not 'a ready surface awaiting signification' but rather 'a set of boundaries, individual and social, politically signified and maintained' (Butler, 1990, p.33)

Constraint is thus 'built into what the language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender' (Butler, 1990, p.9).

Thus the limits of the discursive analysis of the subject presuppose and pre-empt the possibilities of cultural configurations of it at both the symbolic/imaginable and the realisable level.

Sexual difference ... is translated by and translates a difference in the relationship of subjects to the symbolic contract which is the social contract: a difference, then, in the relationship to power, language and meaning.

(Kristeva, 1979, p.196)

For Butler (1990) subjectivity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results (Butler, 1990, p.25). Thus what is understood in culture to be an intelligible subject position is not the consequence or product of natural identities and differences. Rather, the meanings of sexed, gendered and sexualised subject positions are produced through the repeated performance of words and actions which are coded as male/female, masculine/feminine or heterosexual/homosexual.

Like Flax (1992) I recognise that meanings, or definitions, of sex, gender and sexuality are historically variable and 'internally differentiated' (Flax, 1992, p.194) relations of domination. They connote and reflect asymmetric power relations rather than natural, biological or anatomical differences. Within binary logic, abstract differences are identified as real differences and are linked to sex, gender and sexuality. These differences are also conceived as oppositional, hierarchical, absolute and asymmetrical dualisms rather than 'pluralisms in an indefinite and open universe' (Flax, 1992, p.194).

It is important I think to recognise that oppositional or phallogentric representations of sexed, gendered and sexualised bodies can be challenged and transformed, and that we need not accept propositions of biological, unchallengeable natural differences between the sexes as the basis for their social status. Thus, whilst biology provides a basis for social inscription of the body it is not fixed or static, but understood to interact with a complex web of social and signifying relations.

Indeed, it is my argument that biology itself, as ideology and discourse, is a cultural construction and 'the link between a sexed body and a gendered individual is not necessary but contingent' (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994, p.34). Similarly, Crowley & Himmelweit (1992) suggest that

It is only through cultural practices, the discourses of society, that we have experience of anything that we might call our biology and in particular, our bodies.

(Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992, p.65)

Sex and gender, sex/gender

Davies (1989) suggests that sex and gender are both elements of social structures, created by and within individuals as they learn the discursive practices through which those structures are created and maintained. Thus these social structures are not separate from the individuals who construct or inhabit them. Though social structures have a material force they cannot be imposed on individuals. Rather, they are actively taken up, contested or transformed.

Seidler (1989) recognises that the biological and the natural are often opposed to the socially and historically constructed. In a similar way sex is seen as part of the natural, which in turn comes to be seen as the biological, and gender is seen as a radically separated discourse which is socially and historically constituted. In this way discussion and analysis of gender is split into separate and autonomous realms. Yet, observes Seidler (1989)

many of the interesting questions seem to straddle, if not contest, these categorisations. We discover intellectual distinctions coming to have an existence and reality of their own, independent of the problems and contradictions in the experience of women and men they are supposed to illuminate.

(Seidler, 1989, p.188)

In distinguishing between the biological and the social and highlighting the difference between sex and gender, sex has been defined as the biological distinction/difference between males and females, including genes, chromosomes, hormones, reproductive functions and genitals, and gender has been defined as the differences between women and men that are socially constructed and inform the way they identify, behave, think and experience themselves, as women and men. However, Connell (1991), Crowley & Himmelweit (1992), Davies (1989, 1993) and Rhode (1990) question any absolute distinction between sex and gender and, by implication, any distinction between body and mind, where sex is defined by the body and gender by a state of mind. Rather, Crowley & Himmelweit (1992) assert that

It is only through cultural practices, the discourses of society, that we have experience of anything that we might call our biology and, in particular, our bodies.

(Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992, p.65)

This view collapses the certainties of binary logic through which choices between two things are rendered oppositional and where one of the choices is always privileged at the expense of the other. Given this blurring of the boundaries between the biological and the social Davies (1993) collapses the boundaries between the terms by joining and slashing them, sex/gender, and in so doing 'the term 'gender' gathers to it the term 'sex' from which it was previously separated' (Davies, 1993, p.10). For Dollimore (1992) this slash between sex/gender acknowledges the provisional aspect of each of the categories and also the 'confused, unresolved, but always significant dimension of their relationship' (Dollimore, 1992, p.22).

For Butler (1990) any distinction between sex and gender maintains the dichotomous framework within which they are conceived and supports the argument that 'whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed' (Butler, 1990, p.6). If gender refers to the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes then a gender cannot, suggests Butler, be said to follow from a sex in any one way. This suggests 'a radical discontinuity' (Butler, 1990, p.6) between sexed bodies and culturally constructed gender where femininity does not necessarily correspond with female bodies, nor masculinity with male bodies. Whereas a binary gender system assumes a mimetic relation of gender to sex, through which gender mirrors sex or is restricted by it, Butler (1990) suggests that 'there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two' (Butler, 1990, p.6).

Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex ... gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established.

(Butler, 1990, p.7)

In considering how the body comes to be sexed in the first place, Butler suggests that sex was perhaps 'always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all' (Butler, 1990, p.7). Thus if sex itself is a gendered category, it makes little sense to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex.

Gender then, as understood by Butler, is the discursive means by which a 'sexed nature' or 'natural sex' is produced and established as

prediscursive, prior to culture, and understood as a 'politically neutral surface on which culture acts' (Butler, 1990, p.7). Thus, claims for the internal stability and binary frame for sex are premised on the duality of sex in a prediscursive domain. This production of sex as prediscursive is understood by Butler to be the apparatus and result of a cultural construction designated by gender. Butler is thus interested in a reformulation of gender that encompasses the relations of power that produce the effect of a prediscursive sex and at the same time conceal its discursive production.

For Butler sex is both discursive and perceptual, and denotes 'an historically contingent epistemic regime, a language that forms perception by forcibly shaping the interrelationships through which physical bodies are perceived' (Butler, 1990, p.114). In this way the 'socially real' is produced through the locutionary acts of speaking subjects (Butler, 1990, p.115). Discursive categories like sex and gender are thus linguistic abstractions, categories and conventions which are imposed upon the social field and which result in a reified consensual reality.

In this way, physical attributes acquire social meaning and unification through their articulation within the category of sex. Sex, as a means of categorising/defining the subject/body thus imposes an artificial unity and coherence on an 'otherwise discontinuous set of attributes' (Butler, 1990, p.114) and reduces multiplicity and possibility to either/or dualistic choices between fixed options. The naming of sex is, for Butler, both an act of domination and compulsion. It is institutionalised and performative, and as such creates, legislates and polices social reality by requiring the construction of bodies that conform to dualistic principles of sexual difference. 'Language assumes and alters its power to act upon the real through locutionary acts, which, repeated, become entrenched practices and, ultimately institutions' (Butler, 1990, p.116). Thus, for Butler, the power of language to act on bodies is both the cause of sexual oppression and the way beyond it. In generating new discourses it becomes possible to speak/write new subject positions into existence, positions from which current configurations of sex, gender and sexuality, and the relations of power they imply, may cease to be meaningful.

Like Butler (1990) I argue that sex and gender are both discursive and performative and constitute the identity they are purported to describe. There is no gendered identity behind the expression of gender, nor any sexed identity behind the expressions of sex. Rather, they are both performatively

constituted by the expressions that are claimed to be their result; they are effect recast as cause (Butler, 1990, p.25).

Sex/gender attributes are thus understood as constitutive and performative, and not expressive. This distinction between expression and performance is critical, for if gender attributes and acts, 'the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification', are performative, then 'there is no pre-existing identity by which an act or attribute might be measured ... and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction' (Butler, 1990, p.141).

The appearance of a sexed or gendered subject is thus produced by 'the regulation of attributes along culturally established lines of coherence' and taken to be 'a fictive production performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence' (Butler, 1990, p.24). Sex and gender, then, are constructions, the genesis of which is concealed through the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce and sustain discrete polar subject positions. These polarised positions are cultural fictions, yet their fictional status is obscured by the credibility of their construction and the punishments that attend disagreement with, or divergence from, them. 'Gender is performative with clearly punitive consequences' (Butler, 1990, p.139) and compels belief in its necessity and naturalness. 'The historical possibilities materialised through various corporeal styles are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions alternatively embodied and deflected under duress' (Butler 1990, p.140).

Sexuality

Sexualities, like genders, are performative constructions naturalised through repetition. These repetitions foreground how sexuality like gender, is worked and reworked by the subject within performative constraints.

(Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.142)

Like Seidler (1995) I argue that knowledge itself is constituted by sexuality and, more precisely heterosexuality, in a context where the powerful, usually men, are able to identify themselves with things that are culturally valued and thereby denigrate the powerless, often women, by associating them with the things that are socially abhorred.

Within a system of hierarchical oppositional dualisms, this process of othering privileges the powerful. I have argued earlier that power is unequally distributed on the basis of sex, gender and sexuality, and that heterosexual men, especially those representing the exalted form of hegemonic masculinity, have greater access to various forms of social power than women or those men who represent subordinated masculinities. Here I am arguing that all sexualities are defined in terms of heterosexual norms which are fundamentally masculinist. Heterosexual women are constructed as men's other, and those women who identify as lesbian are doubly othered in that they are still ascribed a position in sexual relations in terms of the presence or absence of sexual encounters with men. Male homosexuality is clearly other to the heterosexual, masculinist norm. As Connell (1995) observes

Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity ... Hence, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity.

(Connell, 1995, p.78)

Thus I am arguing that the categories sex, gender and sexuality are discursively produced and reproduced in specific historical, political and social contexts; that their meanings are relationally constructed and not fixed; and that they cannot be meaningfully separated. Like Butler (1990) I assert that subjectivity, subject positions and social subjects are produced through sustained, stylised and repetitive social performances within a context of social permission and regulation, and that notions of an essential, fixed and true femininity or masculinity conceal both the performative character of sex, gender and sexuality, and the performative possibilities for configurations of them outside the restrictive binarisms which result in 'masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality' (Butler, 1990, p.141).

Sexuality is a component in the practices of social meaning, where people with sexual identities in sexualised locations make themselves intelligible to others 'through specific grids of meaning which are written (as it were) on the body' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.142).

Sexuality is not, then, simply defined by private sexual acts or preferences but is 'a public process of power relations' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.141) in which everyday interactions take place between actors with sexual identities in sexualised locations. In a patriarchal context these sexualised locations are heterosexual and in this way patriarchal, phallogocentric discourses systematically heterosexualise both the personal and the public dimension.

Like Bell and Valentine (1995) I am arguing that by destabilising heterosexual identities it is possible to destabilise the heterosexual space that those performing hegemonic, heterosexual identities produce. Further, it is only through revealing their performativity that the link between certain identities and meanings is disrupted and 'the slipperiness of all selves is revealed' (Bell & Valentine, 1995, p.149).

Butler (1990), in arguing that sex, gender and sexuality are regulatory fictions, explores the possibilities for their disruption or subversion. This does not involve denial of any sense of identity but rather, embraces multiple discordant identities which subvert the dichotomous categories and causal links between sex/gender, male/female heterosexual/homosexual, and which contest the coherence of male/man/masculine and female/woman/feminine.

In/ter/vention

The subject, as understood by Butler (1990), is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is a regulated process of repetition and not a founding act. Yet, the rules governing signification both restrict and enable the assertion of alternatives, of new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid conditions and boundaries of hierarchical binarisms.

The injunction to be a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated.

(Butler, 1990, p.145)

Conformity to, or divergence from, available subject positions, results from the contradictory and idiosyncratic responses of the subject being inscribed. This recognition of diversely inscribed and constructed bodies and subjectivities suggests that the current sex/gender order may be disrupted. If we challenge the categories by which bodies are currently inscribed, and create multiple, possible subject positions, then bodies which cease to conform to the old stereotypes and expectations may be constructed in ways yet to be imagined, ways that do more than reverse the traditional binary logic to which all discourses are captive.

Prime among possible in/ter/ventions is the acknowledgment that 'the real and factual are functions that bodies are compelled to approximate but

never can' (Butler, 1990, p.145). In/ter/ventions need therefore to expose the rift between the real and the fictive, 'whereby the real admits itself as phantasmic' (Butler, 1990, p.145).

Just as bodily surfaces are enacted as the natural, these surfaces can become the site of a 'dissonant and denaturalised performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself' (Butler, 1990, p.146). The subsequent destabilisation and loss of gender norms would result in the proliferation of configurations of gender and the binary fictions 'man' and 'woman' that underlie 'the naturalising narratives of compulsory heterosexuality' (Butler, 1990, p.146). Through the repetition of these radical proliferations, gender norms are further destabilised and subverted. These intentional subversive repetitions disrupt the commonsense, natural conceptions and understandings of binary gender identity and in so doing create 'gender trouble' (Butler, 1990, p.34).

Yet, as Haste (1993) recognises, crossing the boundary of binary gender identity is problematic, 'even if the acquisition of certain positively valued Other qualities is a benefit' (Haste, 1993, p.85). For both women or men becoming more, or less, like a woman or man may be negatively interpreted by a culture which holds binary sex/gender differences as innate and natural. Thus, transgressions across sex/gendered boundaries may result in reprisals and sanctions, both formal and informal. Yet, as Bell and Valentine (1995) and Butler (1990) recognise, these transgressions do occur.

Within the tense arena of sexual politics, the performative choices available to those with non- or counter- hegemonic sexualities are in part an embodiment of the regulatory regimes which operate to constrain the possibilities of performance, and in part a claiming of the sexed self as a site of resistance precisely to those regulatory regimes.

(Bell & Valentine, 1995, p.143)

Subjects then, are not uniformly subjected to a closed set of subject positions. Rather, available subject positions are taken up in a variety of ways within a variety of contexts and locations (Butler, 1990; Spencer, 1995). Transgender identities, drag, straight or macho homosexualities, lesbian mothers, female weight-lifters and other similarly diverse subject positions subvert the sex/gender stereotypes and norms characteristic of the particular historical/political/social context in which they are generated. As Connell (1995) recognises, sexed/gendered/sexualised subjectivities are fractured and shifting as a result of the ways in which multiple discourses intersect in any individual life. In arguing that individual subjects take up, resist or subvert

available subject positions, I am foregrounding the role of the subject in making choices and taking action.

Through the process of socialisation, the extant physical environment, and so on, individuals draw upon social structure. But at each moment they do this they must also reconstitute that structure through the production or reproduction of the conditions of production and reproduction. They therefore have the possibility, as, in some sense, capable and knowing agents, of reconstituting or even transforming that structure.

(Thrift, 1983, p.29)

Agency

To stand before someone else's mirror is to find yourself travestied and distorted. To step through the looking-glass into the space of illusion is to become exposed, unstable, inventing yourself *and knowing it*.

(Sage, 1992, p.121)

What I am arguing for here is a view of the subject as capable of change, where agency is understood as conscious, intentional, motivated action. For Eagleton (1996) agency refers to the capacity, possibility and opportunity for the subject to act 'on their own behalf and in their own interests' (Eagleton, 1996, p.342). As articulated in this text the concept of agency explores the processes and practices through which subjects come to 'place themselves in power-ridden, discursively constituted, practically-limited, materially-bound identities' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.39). The agent, or doer, then, is not understood to possess 'some stable existence prior to the cultural field it negotiates' (Eagleton, 1996, p.342).

I argue that the subject is neither fixed nor stable, but rather a place where meaning emerges and is contested, and is therefore a locus of power. In my exploration of agency I want to emphasise a view of subjectivity that emphasises choosing rather than being, and am searching for new situations, or new perspectives on familiar situations, where new choices are ever present. This disruption of the familiar is a central theme in both my autobiographical stories and my articulation of theory as transformative practice.

There is now a general swing back in the social sciences and humanities from extreme forms of poststructuralist thought, in which the subject is only an effect of discourses, to a consideration of forms of subjectivity which, although limited and contingent, can still assert a degree of agency.

(Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.23)

The concept of agency assumes that the subject is not simply determined by the cultural norms of gender difference. It recognises that there is no single masculine or feminine identity, but rather variable and disputed positions in which different subjects locate themselves differently. The subject, then, actively participates in the performance of stylised repetitions through which these norms are established. There is space for change, for the rules to be challenged and rewritten, for variation of the regulated processes and practices of repetition. The subject then is 'not only the product of discursive practices and signification but retains a certain autonomy to act with, through and against those practices and signs' (Eagleton, 1996, p.343).

Like Butler (1990) I stress that construction is not opposed to agency. The critical task is the location of strategies for in/ter/vention enabled by these constructions. These strategies affirm the possibilities of in/ter/ventions through participating in those practices that both constitute subjectivity and present the possibility of contesting them. As much as I am able to make choices about what I think, believe and value, how I inhabit, present and animate my body, how I inscribe myself as 'male' and 'homosexual', these choices are constrained by the options available to me in particular contexts and by my own selection from, and combination of, these options. Thus I argue that in contesting, critiquing and transforming currently available options, new possibilities, new subject positions, may be generated. This is an act of in/ter/vention.

For Butler (1990) the reconceptualisation of identity as an effect, as produced, constructed and generated, opens up possibilities of agency that are foreclosed by positions that take identity categories to be foundational and fixed. Understanding identity as an effect, means that:

It is neither fatally determined nor fully artificial and arbitrary. That the constructed status of identity is misconstrued along these two lines suggests the ways in which ... discourse on cultural construction remains trapped within the unnecessary binarism of free will and determinism.

(Butler, 1990, p.147)

Heckman (1992) acknowledges that although individual subjects are constructed through categories and social formations and practices, they are

able to rework these influences in their own ways. They are thus able to avoid complete determination by them and are able to construct a particular subject position from the various ideological formations available to them. de Laurentis (1984) argues that the agency of the subject is made possible through shifting and multiple forms of consciousness which are constructed through available discourses and practices. Yet, they are always open to interrogation through the process of self reflexive, self-analysing critique and inquiry. de Laurentis (1984) connects the notion of an inner self, the basis of the cartesian subject, with the notion of external determination, the postmodern constituted subject. de Laurentis argues that the subject is formed through the interaction and intersection of these inner and outer worlds. Subjectivity then, is an ongoing construction, not a fixed entity and is not simply produced by external ideas, values or material causes 'but by one's personal, subjective engagement in the practices, discourses and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, effect) to the events of the world' (de Laurentis, 1984, p.159). Thus de Laurentis conceptualises the subject as simultaneously having agency and being part of discursive practices; a socially constructed subject with agency.

Thus subjectivity is both an individual and social construction. Such a view shifts the emphasis from structural constants that program behaviour to conditions that foster variability and change as a function of human agency. Passive determinism is displaced by a theory of dynamic action where socially structured relationships are produced and reproduced through people's actions. Yet, to assume flexibility and choice in the construction of subjectivity requires an appreciation of the context in which those identities are constructed.

Choices are not made in a vacuum but are shaped by such transitory factors as the other people involved and the prevailing societal norms ... social interaction can be viewed as a process of identity negotiation.
(Deaux & Major, 1990, p.92)

What I am proposing is that subjects, as knowers, observers and actors, have an active role in maintaining or creating social reality through their cognitions and behaviours. Thus, people choose, though not necessarily at a conscious level, to act out gender related behaviours which may vary with circumstances. The choices they make reflect the interaction between cognitive factors, mental constructs based on conceptual categories, beliefs, values and self-definitions, and desires and motives that relate to objectives or

intentions for particular actions or interactions. Deaux and Major (1992, p.92) assert that individual acts cannot be understood without recognition of the determinants of behaviour in mental acts or without reference to social context. Changes in context result in changes in outcome and these challenge assumptions about the stability of male/female differences. This suggests a move from rigid dualisms to a view of gender as fluid and situated.

Attention to the dynamics of social contexts helps situate gender in relationship to other lines of difference and inequality. The meanings of gender are not unitary but multiple, and sometimes contradictory.
(Thorne, 1990, p.110)

Like Violi (1992) I suggest that the process of self representation involves a relationship between an internal image or individual representation and the collective images impressed upon us. Subjectivity then, is 'like a sort of hinge between these two realities; it is the way we inscribe our internal self representations into existing forms of social and hence visible representations' (Violi, 1992, p.174).

Purpose

What I am struggling to do here is conceptualise a set of variously described terms, body, self, person, consciousness, identity and subjectivity, in terms of both structure and agency. Like Pile & Thrift (1995) I recognise that social structures do not exist without human agency and that social structures at least set the parameters within which human subjects behave, and at most set the rules for allowed, prohibited and enabled thoughts and actions.

In negotiating this set of interconnected terms I recognise that their meanings are 'more equivocal, ambiguous, sometimes evasive and always contested' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.6). I am not attempting to fix meanings as final, but rather situate them as relational, contingent and partial, as part of the continual process of moving into new territory, apprehending new ideas and 'constructing new knowledges which have the potential to empower people and communities by producing in them new capacities for action' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.10).

Now the movement in and out of gender as ideological representation, which I propose characterises the subject of feminism, is a movement back and forth between the representation of gender (in its male-centred

frame of reference) and what that representation leaves out, or, more pointedly, makes unrepresentable. It is a movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces both discursive and social that exist, since feminist practices have (re)constructed them, in the margins ... of hegemonic discourses and in the interstices of institutions.

(de Laurentis, 1987, p.26)

It is this space-off, this elsewhere that I seek. I have located this search in the context of a politicised subjectivity that is both conscious and wilful, capable of agency in the project of both personal and social transformation. I recognise three strategic locations in which such transformation might be possible; the idea of shifting, reformulated identities; the critique of dualistic thinking; and the political importance of language and discourse. I have begun an exploration of the idea of shifting identities in this chapter, and continue it in the next; chapter two focuses on language and discourse; and in the next chapter I undertake a critique of dualistic thinking. In foregrounding conscious, wilful action as prerequisite to change I include, alongside a critique of binary thinking, an exploration of both consciousness and possibilities for transformation.

CHAPTER FIVE: dualism, consciousness and transformation

HER STORY

Grafting is the means whereby a plant, perhaps tender or uncertain, is fused into a hardier member of its strain, and so the two take advantage of each other and produce a third kind, without seed or parent. In this way fruits have been made resistant to disease and certain plants have learned to grow where previously they could not.

There are many in the Church who condemn this practice as unnatural, holding that the Lord who made the world made its flora as he wished and in no other way.

Tradescant has been praised in England for his work with the cherry, and it was on the cherry that I first learned the art of grafting and wondered whether it was an art I might apply to myself.

My mother, when she saw me patiently trying to make a yield between a Polstead Black and a Morello, cried ... 'Of what sex is that monster you are making?'

I tried to explain to her that the tree would still be female although it had not been born from seed, but she said such things had no gender and were a confusion to themselves.

'Let the world mate of its own accord,' she said, 'or not at all'.

What I would like is to have some of Tradescant grafted on to me ...

Winterson, 1987, p.78

This metaphor of grafting brings together the many elements of my text. Here the sense of fusion connects the familiar with the strange, the old with the new, the habitual with the possible. This sense of fusion is critical to my desire to think/write/speak differently, beyond the discursive limits of an either/or paradigm. It captures too my desire for reinscription, for becoming, for personal transformation and social change. In seeking to disrupt the familiar I want to bring into question all that is taken to be true, real, right, good and natural. I recognise that such questioning, such transformation and change will, like the grafters in Winterson's tale, be variously met with hostility, resistance and condemnation. Yet I recognise too that this act of grafting may transform weakness into strength, uncertainty into clarity, vulnerability into resistance. Here the familiar is reinscribed within available discursive possibilities. Thus this act of grafting is simultaneously within and against. Finally, this metaphoric grafting is what I have been seeking. I want to locate, imagine and create different narrative possibilities through which my fictive subjectivity may be told, and continuously retold, invented and reinvented.

In what follows I attempt to capture some sense of a moment in which I relocated myself from within a discourse of power to a discourse of love, grafting myself onto something more desired, more empowering, more liberating.

MY STORY

I am in a room . A consulting room. I am consulting this man. He is a psychiatrist. I am telling him everything I can about who I have been. Who I no longer want to be. I can't, as yet, tell him who I would like to be. What I want to become. I don't know yet. All I know is that I don't want to be who I am now. Or who I was, back then. In that childhood in which I was so wounded. So carelessly. So long ago. Since when I have carried my wound with me. Always with me. So diligently. Both anchor and shackle. Yet always, somehow, despite my sense of nothingness, of woundedness, I carried also some small and protected kernel of inchoate joy. This fragile thing helped me negotiate and survive the complexity of the life lived so far. I have survived, I tell this man, myself. As if I somehow doubt it. I have survived. I am still here . Struggling. But optimistic. I am trying to explain this feeling to this man who listens to me. So carefully. I am trying to make sense of something. But in a different way. Not a this or a that way. A simple one or the other way. I seek a different geometry with which to map my meanings. My self. Not straight lines between opposite points. But triangles. Stacked on top of one another. Triangulating. Tessellating. Proliferating. Endlessly. Right now I see two triangles. Sometimes base to base, forming a diamond. Sometimes drifting apart. I am at the apex of each. But the base lines are different. On one triangle it is comprised of father and brother. On the other, sister and mother. One line wholly male. One wholly female. One connecting to me on both sides, triangulating relations of power. The other, triangulating also, but in a relation of love. My binary worlds. Each world equally solid at its base. Male. Female. Power. Love. This is both my wound and my survival. My tense balance. The tense balance that keeps me taut at the edge of the abyss of my fear and pain. I know it is not hopeless, this situation. I am not lost. I am not helpless. I am redeemable. I am redeemed. I am redeemed by love. Reclaimed. Reinscribed. That inchoate kernel of joy burgeons. And I see, in this moment, in this room, with this man, the possibility of healing. The possibility of reinscription. For reinscribing myself, ourselves, each other, our reality. Our world. I see the transformative possibility of love. Leaving this man's room, consulted, I carry with me my wound. But it is not alone. I carry also, consciously for the first time, this love that makes things possible. I carry it carefully. With reverence. I want to preserve it. Share it. Share its possibility.

I have, both through and throughout this text, reconstructed a fictionalised narrative of my childhood. Central to this narrative is the retelling of an experience of sexual abuse. This experience has been recast as betrayal, and the idea of betrayal has become a theme through which the various subjects of my text have been drawn together.

As much as I was betrayed by my father and his power, I have betrayed myself, and others, by taking up attitudes, values, beliefs, actions and subject positions that have been shaped by binary thinking and logic. I have taken for granted the oversimplified categorisation of all people, objects, phenomena and experiences into polarised meanings and positions. I assumed that these things could only be understood as either true or false, right or wrong, good or bad, negative or positive, victor or victim, ally or enemy, active or passive, natural or artificial, essential or arbitrary, normal or deviant, male or female, masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual, and so, endlessly, on. Despite some awareness of a complexity beyond these assumptions, some discomfort with their inadequacy, I lacked a discursive framework within which to contest or disrupt them. I lacked a language of complaint. Thus lacking I was trapped in an ideological framework constrained by hierarchical, oppositional, dualistic thinking.

My way through and beyond this has been alternatively complex, confusing and revealing, and I have struggled, in this text, to move beyond where I was. This has necessitated a self-conscious, self-reflexive exploration of a range of issues, ideas and theoretical discourses. This has been a struggle motivated towards an altered awareness or consciousness of the ideologically invested discourses and discursive practices that have shaped my subject position, my relationships, my values, knowledge, imagination and reality. I conceptualise betrayal as a cultural pattern, experienced individually and collectively. I suggest that in a culture of betrayal, social subjects, once betrayed, learn to betray both themselves and others, and come to accept betrayal as an inevitable dimension of human experience, so much so that it becomes invisible. I propose that this betrayal is experienced and expressed within the dimension of human relationships; personal, social and political, sexual, familial and custodial. I suggest that the issue of power lies at the heart of this complex web of betrayals. In unmasking this betrayal of power I am struggling to articulate a vision of love that enables movement into a complex web of possibility. In what follows I explore the relationship between dualisms, consciousness and transformation, and in so doing

continue to map the territory I am traversing between the familiar and the strange, between the habitual and the possible.

OUR STORY

Purpose

I am attempting, in producing this text, to make connections across a variety of discourses and search for relationships that illuminate the territory I am attempting to map. That territory is simultaneously myself, my embodied subject position, and that of the historical/political/social location in which I, and other embodied subjects, reside.

My purpose in mapping this territory is to become familiar with the discourses through which it is made meaningful and come to some understanding of the processes and practices through which it has become familiar; through which it has become my familiar. It is also my intention, in this self-reflexive deconstructivist text, to disrupt this familiarity that I might foreground its constructedness and in so doing locate points of fracture, or spaces of freedom, in which possibilities for new discourses and new subject positions proliferate.

This search for proliferating possibilities is grounded in a politics of empowerment where subjects as social agents are ascribed with, and inscribed by, the possibility of conscious, intentional, motivated, wilful action. Like Connell (1995) I am attempting to articulate 'a politics of pure possibility' (Connell, 1995, p.243) where existing knowledge is not abandoned but reconfigured in ways that open up possibilities concealed by hegemonic social structures, discourses and practices.

Practice never occurs in a vacuum. It always responds to a situation, and situations are structured in ways that admit certain possibilities and not others. Practice does not proceed into a vacuum either. Practice makes a world. In acting, we convert initial situations into new situations. Practice constitutes and reconstitutes structures. Human practice is onto-formative. It makes the reality we live in.

(Connell, 1995, p.65)

Practice, as onto-formative, constitutes reality, a reality that is 'dynamic in time' (Connell, 1995, p.81), changeable and open to the possibility of transformation through practice which is 'literally history making' (Connell, 1995, p.81).

My project is thus simultaneously historical, political and social and engages me in thinking 'both in our current situations and beyond them, about

current practice and possible utopia' (Connell, 1995, p.225). Such thinking invites speculation about a world of possibility which will 'indeed be 'something rich & strange' not something we have had before' (Connell, 1995, p.225).

This chapter provides a background for such a project by exploring the idea of difference; of how hierarchical, dualistic, oppositional thinking constructs difference in terms of sex, gender and sexuality; of the difference this makes in both social relations and relations of power; and of how we might think differently about knowledge, truth, reality and subjectivity, that we may transform them through counter-hegemonic practice. What I am foregrounding here is the relationship between hierarchical, oppositional dualisms, consciousness and transformation.

In situating discussion of the subject in the historical/political/social context of patriarchy I am, like Connell (1995), focussing on 'the processes through which men and women conduct gendered lives' (Connell, 1995, p.71). Subjectivity is thus conceived in terms of; a location in gender relations and relations of power; the practices through which women and men are positioned as female/male, feminine/masculine, homosexual/heterosexual; and the effect of these practices on bodily experience, personality and culture (Connell, 1995, p.71).

Dualism

I recognise that different authors variously refer to the terms dualism, binarism and dichotomy and rather than homogenising them, I take their meanings to be synonymous and use them interchangeably.

Within patriarchal culture binary logic reduces available subject positions to a series of mutually exclusive, twofold choices; male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, where there is some assumed continuity both across and between the categories. These dualisms also define the terms in which knowledges, truths and realities are constructed through specific structures and practices in specific contexts. Like Connell (1995) I recognise that practice does not consist of isolated acts, but is generated within definite structures of social relations. For Connell these relations are organised through the reproductive arena and 'form one of the major structures of all documented societies' (Connell, 1995, p.72).

In this way the male/female dualism, and all the distinctions that flow from it, is embodied in the discursive representation of 'the different (possible) reproductive functions of bodies discursively produced as either male or female' (Connell, 1995, p.72). Further, these discursive/linguistic distinctions become solidified, and generalised, in discourses through which those distinctions come to be taken as real, true and absolute.

I have argued in an earlier chapter that the knowing human subject exists as an embodied agent, and that this embodiment is made meaningful in terms of the categories of sex, gender and sexuality through which they are inscribed. These categories are dualistic and inform the interpretive frameworks through which meaning is made and knowledge becomes known. Thus, both the subject and their world are conceived, imagined and known in terms of polarities. These dualisms are hierarchical, authority-dependent and always imply relations of power. Further, these dualisms are 'powerful templates ... etched ... in our minds' (Belenky et al, 1986, p.9). Cameron emphasises that the urge to dichotomise is 'secondary indoctrination rather than native habit' (1990, p.61) and is typical not so much of ordinary talk but of the systems of logic and dialectic that are socially taught and learned. Further, these systems of logic and dialectic reflect 'a general and conscious patriarchal policy of constructing a sexual dichotomy in every area of human experience' (Cameron, 1990, p.62). Cameron observes that this tendency to classify in terms of an opposition of male and female principles is recurrent in patriarchal thinking and asserts that this opposition is neither true nor fundamental, but is rather artifice and construct (1990, p.57).

These artificial, constructed binary pairs are fundamental to the discursive production of concepts such as truth, reality, knowledge, and identity (Grosz, 1990, p.93). In recognising that thinking in terms of oppositions has deep roots in culture and thought, Siedler (1991) asserts that these dualistic modes of thought form, and inform, our commonsense understanding of ourselves, others and our reality, and operate in the everyday organisation of our relationships.

By foregrounding the centrality of dualisms in the production and reproduction of patriarchal discourses, I am arguing that patterns of perception and classification in patriarchal culture are organised through dual hierarchical oppositions. I recognise that these dualisms are historically and socially produced and function to validate and perpetuate the status quo. Cixous (1981) recognises the pattern of oppositions in patriarchal ideology and discourse to be broadly grouped around two poles: the feminine,

negative/passive/nature; and the male, positive/active/spirit. These polarisations are encoded in language and run through the symbolic system through which we experience and understand the world. They impute sovereignty to that which is defined positive over that which is defined negative; good over evil, right over wrong, man over woman, heterosexual over homosexual. For Cixous these hierarchically ordered patterns of oppositions amount to a language of oppression (1981, p.44).

Grosz (1990) observes that Western metaphysics is structured in terms of dichotomies and binary oppositions, the dominant of which defines the terrain of the other. This other is ascribed the position of subordination or secondariness. Thus, binary pairs do not define two equal and independent terms. In each pair, the first is autonomous and represents a positive value, the second is contingent and represents a negative value. Further, the second is a deprived or lacking version of the first and is determined and described by the absence of features, values and associations ascribed to the first and ascendant term. The very structure of binary oppositions is privileged by the male/non-male distinction. Yet, as Grosz (1990, p.100) notes, simple reversal of the position of the binary terms, privileging female over male, is a strategy that remains within binary logic and does not therefore contest the phallogocentric, logocentric nature of the structures themselves.

Badinter (1989), Plumwood (1993) and Wiltshire (1989) recognise the centrality of sets of contrasting pairs as key elements in the dualistic structure of western thought and assert that 'any distinction can in principle be treated as a dualism' (Plumwood, 1993, p.43). These dualisms

are key ones for western thought, and reflect the major forms of oppression in western culture. In particular the dualisms of male/female, mental/manual (mind/body), civilised/primitive, human/nature correspond directly to and naturalise gender, class, race and nature oppressions respectively, although a number of others are indirectly involved. Their development has been a historical process, following a historical sequence of evolution.

(Plumwood, 1993, p.43)

The following table by Wiltshire (1989) demonstrates how the metaphor of dualism is mapped from the male/female distinction onto other oppositional pairs. Badinter's (1989) table demonstrates how binary logic informs stereotyped conceptions of difference as opposition and how these stereotypes inform commonsense understandings of masculine and feminine traits, capabilities and potentials.

Knowledge (accepted wisdom)	/	ignorance (the occult and taboo)
higher (up)	/	lower (down)
good, positive	/	negative, bad
mind (ideas), head, spirit	/	body (flesh) womb (blood)
		Nature (Earth)
reason (the rational)	/	emotions and feelings (the irrational)
cool	/	hot
order	/	chaos
control	/	letting be, allowing, spontaneity
objective (outside, 'out there')	/	subjective (inside, immanent)
literal truth, fact	/	poetic truth, metaphor, art
goals	/	process
light	/	darkness
written text, Logos	/	oral tradition, enactment, myth
Apollo as sky-sun	/	Sophia as earth-cave-moon
public sphere	/	private sphere
seeing, detached	/	listening, attached
secular	/	holy and sacred
linear	/	cyclical
permanence, ideal (fixed) forms	/	change, fluctuations, evolution
'changeless and immortal'	/	process, ephemerality (performance)
hard	/	soft
independent, individual, isolated	/	dependent, social, interconnected, shared
dualistic	/	whole
MALE	/	FEMALE

(Wilshire 1989, pp.95-6)

The logic of opposites (Badinter 1989, p.93)

Traits of the masculine stereotype		Traits of the feminine stereotype
	Emotional stability	
Decided, firm steady, calm		Capricious, hysterical, sensitive, nervous, emotional, puerile, frivolous
	Control mechanisms	
Disciplined, methodical, organised, rigid, likes organising, discreet, outspoken		Talkative, incoherent, affected, secretive, scatterbrained, sly
	Autonomy, dependence	
Patriotic, likes risk, independent		Need to confide, need to please, flirtatious, submissive
	Dominance, self-assertion	
Need of power, need of fame, ambitious, likes to be in charge, dominating, self-important, sure of himself, need of prestige, arriviste, need to assert himself		Weak
	Aggressiveness	
Combative, cynical, likes a fight		Sly
	Level of activity	
Impetuous		Passive
	Acquisition	
Egoistic, materialistic		Inquisitive
	Intellectual qualities, creativity	
Creative, lucid, objective, likes theoretical ideas. Natural disposition for science and mathematics. Sceptical, rational		Intuitive
	Affective tendencies, sexuality	
Obscene		Affectionate, sympathetic, gentle, modest, likes clothes, need to have children, need of love

Davies recognises that these distinctions form a 'highly recognisable set of concepts' (1994, p.9) through which ideas and ideals of femaleness and maleness are understood as simultaneously imaginary, symbolic and real. Like Davies I recognise something of myself on both sides of these oppositional pairs, acknowledging and taking up those I endorse and rejecting those I do not.

This double visioning is important since it reveals the way in which we can hold intact the idea of maleness and femaleness as binary opposites, even recognise ourselves in that division, at the same time as we can enumerate many examples of transgressions, movement outside the binary division.

(Davies, 1994, p.9)

Disrupting the dualism

Drawing on the work of Butler (1990), Cornwall & Lindisfarne (1994) and Davies (1989, 1993, 1994) I am attempting to locate and explore ways in which the binary construction of sex/gender/sexuality may be disrupted. I argue that the male/female dualism has no intrinsic biological, or any other, essential reality and is, rather, a metaphor for difference. The distinction between the sexed body and the gendered body is understood as a false dichotomy, as is the biological/sociological opposition. I have previously argued that both the sexed body and the gendered subject are culturally constructed through discourses and that biology is no more primary or real than any other discursive construction of lived experience. The interpretation and conflation of the terms man/male/masculine and woman/female/feminine is thus understood as neither inevitable or natural, nor neutral, but as constructed in hierarchical relations of power. The processes of gendering produce differences and inequalities which are most visible in those versions of masculinity associated with positions of privilege and power: dominant/subordinant, master/slave, father/child, man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, and so on.

Interrogation of the categories female and male, and the relations between them, necessitates consideration of how hierarchical relations between women and men reproduce differences within those categories and how those differences, as relations of power, reproduce inequality. Hare-Mustin & Marecek (1990) observe that hierarchical dualisms are predicated on inequality. The representation of gender as dichotomies or opposites

implies symmetry to a relationship that is unequal and denial of any interrelationship between male and female serves to maintain that inequality (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990, p.43). In drawing on poststructuralist feminist theory and deconstruction I am challenging both the opposition and the hierarchy inherent in dualisms, drawing attention to how each term of the binary pair contains elements of the other and depends on it for its meaning, and recognising that 'both sides of the paradigm are glued together in an ultimately complicitous fashion' (Barthes, 1994, p.55).

I recognise that the male/female dichotomies which stem from the morphology of genitalia have been extrapolated to a vast range of other categories. I suggest that a range of biological and behavioural norms are informed by discursively produced knowledges, myths, metaphors and stereotypes that are ideologically and politically motivated. Further, the principle of dualism, and the dualistic categorisation, logic and discursive practice which follow from it, is situated as central to the maintenance of patriarchy. Indeed, Stoltenberg (1990) defines patriarchy as 'the social system of rigid dichotomisation by gender' (Stoltenberg, 1990, p.55), a system through which men maintain power and privilege in culture, where dominance and subordination are mapped onto the male/female, self/other dualisms and where that which is other, or different, is subordinated to that which is same.

Dualism, difference and power

Ruthven (1990, p.50) identifies two dominant forms through which binary systems are manifest as social reality. One is an hierarchical, vertical model which places that which is higher above that which is lower. The other is a horizontal model which has a centre occupied by an elite, with others banished to the margins. 'What is clear is that in these systems men are both top and centre' (Ruthven, 1990, p.50). Similarly, Grosz (1994) observes that dichotomous thinking necessarily hierarchises and ranks polarised terms so that one becomes the privileged term, the other suppressed, becoming the subordinated, negative counterpart. The subordinated term becomes 'merely the negation or denial, the absence or privation of the primary term' (Grosz, 1994, p.3). Within the male/female dualism the male is the ascendant term and the woman is defined as not, or other to, man. In this way binary logic is homogenising and universalist and 'built on the principle of exclusion and the

tyranny of the familiar' (Gunew & Yeatman, 1993, p.xiii). Thus, binary oppositions absorb alterity and difference into the hegemonic and the familiar.

Dualism is central to any ideology or discursive practice that seeks to make a distinction between self and other (Shaef, 1992, p.207), and involves 'the construction of a devalued and sharply demarcated sphere of otherness' (Plumwood, 1993, p.41). This sphere of otherness involves a denied dependency on a subordinated other and thus, the terms are not autonomous or self referential, but other referential. This relationship of denied dependency determines 'a certain kind of logical structure in which the denial and the relation of domination/subordination shape the identity of both the relata' (Plumwood, 1993, p.41). Dualism is then, a structure in which power construes and constructs difference in terms of an inferior, alien and antithetical other. In its systematised form power is institutionalised and naturalised by constructing, co-opting or exaggerating existing forms of difference. Dualisms not only ascribe qualities or characteristics to the relationship between members of contrasting pairs, they also reflect relations of power in the ways these distinctions are treated, the meanings and assumptions that are associated with them and the relationships imposed on them. Like Plumwood (1993) I argue that dualistic conceptual frameworks create difference where none necessarily exists and capitalise on existing patterns of difference by rendering them meaningful and significant in ways that institutionalise and naturalise hierarchy.

Dualism constructs difference as oppositional and hierachical. The more highly valued side is constructed as alien to, and of a different nature or order of being from, the lower inferiorised side. Each side is constructed in terms of the exclusion of qualities shared with the other and this makes overlap or continuity difficult to conceptualise. The dominant side is taken as primary and the subordinated side defined in relation to it. In patriarchy where man is treated as the primary model, woman is constructed as other. Thus, dualism results in the naturalisation of domination; strong over weak, reason over emotion, right over wrong, man over woman, and constructs the identities of the dominant and subordinate terms, and the relationship between them, as inevitable and natural. What is at issue is not simply the perceived differences or distinctions between women and men but rather the dualistic basis of their construction. This construction is discursive and an important aspect of many hegemonic discourses is their focus on 'an absolute, naturalised and typically hierarchised male/female dichotomy whereby men and women are defined in terms of the differences between them' (Cornwell

& Lindisfarne, 1994, p.18). Difference then, is not simply difference as distinction, but difference as distinction in terms of hierarchies of power. Thus I am arguing that patriarchal structures and practices constitute difference as dominance, 'as unavoidably hierarchical' (Connell, 1995, p.231) and that this 'difference/dominance does not mean logical separation but intimate supremacy' (Connell, 1995, p.231).

I recognise that dualisms are integral to the power structures in patriarchal society and are discursive constructions and symbols, not universals. They form a scheme or pattern for classifying the world, and produce the categories and concepts through which subjects make meaning of their lived experience. Oppositional, hierarchical dualisms both describe and limit the production of meaning, and in prohibiting recognition or articulation of 'illuminating connections between things' (Goodison, 1992, p.11) tend to fetishise narrowed, closed meanings.

The possibilities for, and meanings of, lived experience are reflections of social structures and practices. In a patriarchal social structure, where power is typically associated with male authority figures, hierarchical oppositional dualisms privilege those terms associated with men (Goodison, 1992, p.12). In this way the symbolic order has material effects on the lived experience of social subjects. My point here is that the dominant system of meanings and values is not simply abstraction, but lived experience and as such constitutes our sense of reality 'beyond which it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to imagine or enact alternatives' (Goodison, 1992, p.32). Any disruption of binary constructions of knowledge and reality thus require 'a revolution of the imagination' which recognises possibilities for the production of new discourses, discourses freed from the dualistic symbol system that is 'continuously reiterated and endorsed' (Goodison, 1992, p.3) by patriarchal structures and practices. Like Cixous (1981, 1986) I believe that patriarchy is neither destinal nor natural, and argue that once society is freed from the tyranny of dualism, where masculinity and male power are privileged, ways of relating other than those currently available may come into being. I have asserted, in chapter one, that since patriarchy is an historic creation formed by women and men, that it may be transformed by them also, together, and not as oppositional forces in a dualistic, alienated and separated world. Thus I place the transformation of patriarchal relations, of relations between women and men, at the centre of my attempt to articulate a politics of possibility.

Weedon (1991) acknowledges that from a poststructural feminist perspective, biological differences do not have inherent natural or social meanings. Rather, their multiple meanings are produced within a range of conflicting discourses (Weedon, 1991, p.127). Much of this conflict and competition between discourses, can be attributed to the tensions and irreconcilable differences between hierarchical binary opposites: science/society, nature/culture, true/false, objective/subjective, fact/fiction and so on. All discourses are subject to these evaluative dichotomous frameworks and thus struggle for hegemony and authority. This struggle is always a struggle for power and this struggle for power is often rendered invisible by the regimes of truth that naturalise, neutralise and depoliticise a situated, motivated view as transparent, inevitable, obvious and commonsensical. Such commonsense, natural truths inform academic, scientific and lay theories of sex/gender/sexuality. These discursively produced theories account for, or challenge, perceived differences in physiology, morphology, sexuality, emotion, intelligence, desire, and a vast range of capabilities, predispositions and preferences in female and male subjects. They also account for the social relationships between women and men, and since the male/female dualism is at the heart of all conceptions of sex, gender and sexuality, then the relationship between the sexes is the paradigm for understanding all relationships between dichotomous terms, both abstract and lived.

As Bordo (1990) suggests, we 'must get beyond the number two ... and move toward a dizzying accumulation of narratives ... not to do so is to perpetuate a hierarchical binary construction of reality' (Bordo, 1990, p.134). This 'dizzying accumulation of narratives' involves the search for, and articulation of, ideas which reconfigure the realities we take for granted. Social reality is understood in terms of lived social relations, and these social realities, relations and lived experiences are ordered around hierarchical oppositions that come back to the man/woman opposition. This opposition is sustained by means of differences which are constructed as natural through various discourses, such as religion, medicine, biology, law and so on. For Connell this opposition is

the most obvious of structural determinations of sexual character because of the prominence of heterosexual couple relationships in everyday life. It is folklore that opposites attract.

(1991, p.181)

Dualism and deviance

I have argued that a dichotomy is 'a polarisation which ignores overlaps' (Rogers, 1988, p.44). Where differences come to be seen as more interesting than similarities, these differences tend to be seen as absolute. Once again difference is brought within the field of a reductionist understanding of causal chains which promise to locate first causes and absolutes which define the terms within which normality and deviance are constructed. Thus unequal social relations, institutions and practices are maintained through the processes by which individuals come to accept, without question, the hegemony of the socio-political discourses through which they are constructed, and come to construct themselves, as both natural and normal subjects.

Like Butler (1990) and Connell (1991, 1995) I recognise that the institution of compulsory and naturalised heterosexuality regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from the feminine term. 'The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, desire'. (Butler, 1990:22) This differentiation is founded in the heterosexual couple and accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire. Connell (1991) identifies heterosexual desire, that is desire for the other, as one of the structures around which the social construction of sexuality is made possible and meaningful.

Within the dichotomised world of sexual ideology, romanticism dominates the representation of normal social life and sexual relations, where 'true love' is understood as a symbolic reconnection of the dichotomised worlds of men and women. This romantic discourse of true love 'both asserts the rightness of the dichotomy, and claims a way for each woman as a loved individual to escape the narrow and impoverished world the dichotomy constructs for women as a group' (Connell, 1991, p.248). Within the romantic discourse hegemonic masculinity is naturalised in the form of the hero. This focus on exemplary individuals is 'not only a way of justifying privileges which happen to be shared by the unheroic majority of men' (Connell 1991, p.248), but also a way of dealing symbolically with real problems.

Like Segal (1990) I recognise that the polarities of male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, are 'the pivot of contemporary Western thinking on sex' (Segal, 1990, p.101). Sex then, is about sexual difference, the

desire for the other, for the opposite sex. Just as dualistic oppositional thinking elaborates difference and suppresses similarity, so discourses of sex and desire ascribe heterosexuality, desire for the other, as natural and normal, whilst homosexuality, desire for the same, is described as unnatural, abnormal and immoral.

I have located the concept of otherness as central to the production and reproduction of subject positions in terms of sex, gender and sexuality, where the concept of difference defines members of the other group as 'not-like' the self, where 'not-like' is understood as different from, less than, or antithetical to the self/same (Haste, 1993).

Where the model of difference implies that the male is the standard, woman is defined in terms of her lack of, or antithesis to, male characteristics and qualities. In so far as she fails to meet those standards, woman is perceived to be other, where otherness implies deficit. Within this configuration of difference as otherness, the position not-male is not only a deficit, but antagonistic. Otherness defines the self by negation: 'If I lack this negative quality, I am therefore positive. But if I lack this positive quality, if I am 'other-like' I am no longer self-like' (Haste, 1993, p.85). Thus where the other is perceived as threat, self-quality must be sustained in order to avoid the dangers of other-quality. The metaphor of pollution is central to this conception, particularly for the male, since otherness is both inferior and antagonistic (Haste, 1993).

Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity ... Hence from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity.

(Connell, 1996, p.78)

Thus patriarchal culture has a simple interpretation of gay men; they lack masculinity. They are assigned a feminised subject position and this assignment is linked to an axiomatic assumption about sexuality; that opposites attract. Therefore 'if someone is attracted to the masculine, then that person must be feminine - if not in the body then somehow in the mind' (Connell, 1995, p.143).

Kaplan & Rogers (1990) suggest that once we have constructed our world view, and the language through which it is perceived, interpreted and expressed, around the male/female dualism, other concepts become automatically linked to it. Thus, the normal/abnormal dichotomy hangs on the

male/female dichotomy, and if individuals do not fit neatly into either a female or male category, they come to be seen as abnormal, deviant, disordered or diseased (Kaplan & Rogers, 1990, p.225). Such individuals are pathologised, oppressed, or rendered invisible from the hegemonic reality.

For Butler the heterosexualisation of desire requires, and results in, the production of oppositions between feminine and masculine which are understood as attributes of male and female (1990, p.17). From appropriate sex/gender identification, appropriate sexual orientation follows. This cultural matrix of sex, gender and sexuality prescribes which identities can exist, and proscribes those which cannot: those in which gender does not follow from sex, and those in which the practices of desire do not follow from either sex or gender. Those identities which fail to conform to the norms of cultural intelligibility appear as developmental aberrations, failures or impossibilities from within that domain of intelligibility (Butler, 1990, p.17). Yet, as Butler recognises, they do appear, and their continued proliferation provides critical opportunities to explore the limits of that domain and 'open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder' (Butler, 1990, p.17).

I argue that these rival and subversive matrices may be produced in the spaces opened up through deconstruction of the discourses through which this matrix of intelligibility is constructed and through which multiple, non-dualistic differences may be produced.

Multiple, non-dualistic differences

For Segal the dismantling of dualistic oppositional gender hierarchies necessitates the pursuit of change and this is, in part, 'a process of conscious collective action' (1990, p.294). Such action aims to articulate possibilities for the creation of new non-oppressive subject positions for both women and men. Having argued that social realities are not static, I assume that constructions of sex, gender and sexuality and relations between women and men remain open to change and that this change 'whether the intended outcome of emancipatory activity or the unintended consequence of other agencies' (Segal, 1990, p.xiii) is inevitable.

What I am arguing for is a non-dualistic, non-hierarchical, non-oppositional concept of difference; a 'non-reductionist basis for recognising

continuity and reclaiming the ground of overlap between nature, the body and the human' (Plumwood, 1993, p.123). Grosz observes that such a non-hierarchical, non-oppositional construction of difference will necessitate, and result in, the reformulation of the categories female and male, and the relationship between them (1994, p.10).

Cixous (1981) argues that since dualistic modes of thinking and being always result in the representation of sexual difference as opposition, then this opposition always results in the repression or death of one of the terms. In recognising that all the hierarchical binarisms that structure Western thought stem from the man/woman opposition, Cixous identifies a need to work on the couple, to deconstruct and transform the dualistic language in which the male/female dualism is the basic opposition which informs all others. In rejecting the male/female, masculine/feminine, same/other oppositions Cixous formulates a concept of subjectivity that is not oppositional, not othering and begins with

the location within oneself of the preserve of both sexes, evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual, the non-exclusion of difference or of a sex, and starting with this 'permission' one gives oneself, the multiplication of the effects of desires inscription on every part of the body and the other body.

(Cixous & Clement, 1986, p.104)

Cixous constructs this location in terms of a bisexuality, where any acknowledgment of difference does not result in an opposition but rather allows for movement in both directions, from one to the other and back again, without conflict (1981, 1986). I argue that this movement is possible only within a community of interdependent, interrelated subjects and that it cannot be undertaken by alienated, opposed subjects who inhabit discrete and autonomous realms. I thus conceptualise a movement beyond hierarchically constructed patriarchal communities where power and privilege are distributed on the basis of a complex set of oppositional binary terms derived from the male/female dualism; masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, employed/unemployed, rich/poor, black/white, educated/ignorant, strong/weak and so on.

Yet, in arguing for a non-dualistic concept of difference I am not proposing a 'repressive fiction of unity' (Ormer, 1992, p.85). Rather, I am arguing for a proliferation of multiple differences where subject positions beyond those currently available are made possible, do not necessarily imply relations of power and in which subjects are not opposed to each other, but are

rather 'linked to each other in some mutual project' (Formaini, 1990, p.171). For Stoltenberg (1990) such a project is not possible within the context of separation and insularity that results from the dualistic construction of an oppositional self/other, subject/object, but rather is only possible between subject and subject. He suggests that a non-dualistic concept of subjectivity, of subjects in relation, foregrounds both the capacity, and the commitment, to regard another as whole, and not the other half of a binary equation which imputes a fake symmetry or complementarity. This implies the coexistence and cooperation of equally active subjects who 'understand that others are just as real as oneself' (Stoltenberg, 1990, p.60).

Just as Stoltenberg argues for the mutual recognition of subjects as equally complete selves, Ormer (1992) argues for the mutual recognition of subjects as equally other. She suggests that instead of grounding analysis solely on an examination of an oppressed individual or group's status as other, that it be grounded instead in the practice of constructing the other in all of us. In this way Ormer recognises that we are all someone else's other. In juxtaposing these views and creating possibilities beyond an either/or, self/other reality, I am arguing for a non-dualistic, non-hierarchical, non-oppressive concept of difference where subjects are simultaneously self and other, same and different. Such subjects are understood to be relational, that is subjects-in-relation, subjects who are flexible and value multiplicity, mutuality and reciprocity as prerequisites for non-oppressive social relations.

Dualism and deconstruction

Dualism takes a very complex universe and breaks it down into this or that, feeding an illusion of control and, dualisms being static, keep us stuck so we don't have to, or can't, make decisions between two poles, neither one of which makes sense and both of which are oversimplified. Setting the world up in dualities keeps us static and feeds our illusion of control.

(Shaef, 1992, p.208)

Given the relationship between dualism, power and male hegemony in patriarchal culture I argue that the interrogation and disruption of dualistic thinking and categorising is critical to a reconceptualisation of subjectivity, subject positions and social relations between subjects.

It is within poststructuralist feminist theory that I locate possibilities for the disruption and deconstruction of the binarisms through which we

construct our knowledge of ourselves, of other social subjects and the reality we inhabit.

For Lather (1991) deconstruction involves: identification of the binaries or opposites upon which arguments are structured; displacement of the dependent term from its negative position to a place that locates it 'as the very condition of the positive term' (Lather, 1991, p.13); and the creation of a 'more fluid and less coercive' (Lather, 1991, p.13) conceptual organisation of terms which transcends a binary logic by being 'both and neither of the binary terms' (Lather, 1991, p.13). Thus elements of the binary pair are no longer understood in terms of opposition, but rather as inseparable elements of the same thing.

Dollimore recognises the uses of deconstruction for revealing both the limitations of binary logic in the construction of theoretical discourses and 'its often pernicious effects in practice' (Dollimore, 1992, p.64). Deconstruction can be used to demonstrate that binarisms are 'unstable constructs whose antithetical terms presuppose, and can therefore be used against, each other' (Dollimore, 1992, p.64). In recognising that binarisms are fundamental to social organisation and discursive practices, determining both culture and consciousness, Dollimore acknowledges that their influence is not easily erased and that even deconstructed 'they continue to exert an influence' (Dollimore, 1992, p.65).

Thus, what I am arguing for is a move beyond deconstruction and a move toward intervention and invention: in/ter/vention. What I am seeking is a new inscription, a new interval between the poles of a dichotomised reality. Like Heckman (1992) I suggest that new ways of thinking emerge from the spaces of freedom located in the old episteme, from discursive practices and political action that locate and fill spaces left empty, or not conceptualised, in the old structure.

Like Thorne (1993) I suggest that the contrastive framework of dualism has outlived its usefulness, and argue that in place of dualism we need to develop concepts that help us grasp diversity, overlap, contradiction and ambiguity. Such a view shifts analysis from identifying fixed, abstract binary differences to examining the social relations in which multiple differences are, or may be, constructed and given meaning. Thorne (1993) suggests that the project of opening up possibilities for the construction of multiply sited differences requires acts of imagination and transformation, of commitment and action.

Ultimately, the basis of the human capacity for self-transformation lies in the ... act of self overcoming ... Every human act of will has a self-conscious interpretative element.

(Patton, 1993, pp.154-5)

Beyond dualism

I recognise the production of this text to be a self-conscious interpretive act. I am attempting to re/conceptualise my embodied subjectivity both within and beyond a range of discursive positions, practices and meanings.

Like Davies (1993) I am engaged in an exploration of the ways in which the 'apparent inevitability' (Davies, 1993, p.ix) of the male-female dualism might be disrupted. Such disruption aims to 'open up the possibility of multiple genders, of fluidity between gender categories, of movement, in and out of a range of ways of being which were not limited by the dualistic categories of maleness and femaleness' (Davies, 1993, p.ix). Such transformation is made possible through the development of an understanding of the ways in which we become gendered, and through imagining, and 'speaking into existence' (Davies, 1993, p.ix) new ways of being. Habermas' critical theory of communicative action assumes that 'language is the ground of intersubjectivity ... where the 'I' is constituted through acknowledging the discourse of the other' (Habermas, 1971, p.57) and emphasises trust, mutual recognition and reciprocal understanding as central to this communicative action.

I am attempting to conceptualise ways in which discourses may be opened up to 'a free play of signs in which new, more complex and hybrid identities can be formed and created' (Patton, 1993, p.33). I am also attempting to conceptualise a non-oppositional notion of difference which both necessitates, and results in, the reformulation of conceptions of male and female, masculinity and femininity, and of social and sexual relations between variously inscribed subjects. This requires a model of subjectivity that is non-mechanistic, non-dualistic and anti-essentialist. In recognising that subjectivities are historically, politically and socially constructed, both the physical body and the social body are re/situated as 'a series of processes of becoming, rather than a fixed state of being' (Grosz, 1994, p.12). The embodied social subject is thus open to multiple, changing inscriptions.

Butler exposes the inner truth of gender as a fabrication, a 'fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies', a fabrication that is 'neither true nor false but are only produced as the true effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity' (1990, p.337). In place of an original identification or true, essential self as a determining cause, Butler reconceives gender identity as

a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer to ... other limitations which jointly construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or which parody the mechanism of that construction.

(Butler, 1990, p.338)

These received meanings, limitations, illusions and constructed selves and realities acquire meaning, power and embodiment through the binarisms to which all thought and meaning-making are subject. Thus, until dualistic practices are challenged and changed we are forced to think and exist within a dichotomised framework.

Challenging the male-female dualism involves contesting the ideas of femaleness and maleness that the dualism implies. Like Davies I recognise that 'the extent to which the dualism is taken to be true, it is true' (1989, p.109). Our subjectivities are both organised in terms of, and held in place by, social structures and discourses, which are themselves informed by dualisms. Thus any discursive challenge is inevitably complex, difficult and contentious and disrupts our sense of who we are, of our naturalness and individuality, of our social relations and our commonsense understanding of the social world.

Hierarchical dualistic structures and discourses emphasise simplicity, linearity and either/or thinking. They necessitate the ranking of one thing above another and reduce the value placed on multiplicity, diversity and complexity. In so doing, multifaceted and complex qualities are reduced to unitary things that can be measured and compared.

Whereas these hierarchical oppositional dualisms are reductive and contrastive I seek a multiplicity that is inclusive and expansive, and allows for different, diverse and divergent ways of seeing, feeling, thinking and valuing. I seek discourses through which positions that are both/and, rather than either/or, may be articulated. 'Both/and thinking requires a complex mind capable of embracing all the possibilities' (Shepherd, 1993, p.135). Such thinking contests hierarchical laws imposed on static structures and

describes more complex and interactive systems. Like Wiltshire (1990) I am seeking discourses that do not continue the 'dualistic either/or PATTERN' so I am suggesting a non-dualistic both/and PATTERN' (Wiltshire, 1990, p.95).

Like Porter (1991) I am arguing for a redefinition of binarisms as related parts and not as oppositional dualisms where the apparent opposition between the terms of the dualism is questioned and their interrelation emphasised. This proposition does not discount ideas of difference, distinction, or tension within the pairs, but rather, discounts the idea of opposition and antagonism. Neither does this proposition imply complementarity between the sexes, for complementarity is constructed within a dualistic framework in which individuals are posed with either/or choices. Either/or choices result in restrictive boundaries which restrict choices and the range of available, and culturally endorsed, subject positions.

Spaces of freedom

What I am searching for is a middle ground, an in between space, a space of freedom, which emphasises the spillage across binary classifications and questions the presumed inevitability of dualism. This search to locate the territory between polarised dualistic opposites aims to avoid a restless hovering, a naive taking of both sides, or a limiting either/or mentality (Porter, 1991, p.49). This search also aims to locate the terms on which dualistic subjectivities and realities may be transformed into dialectical ones which recognise, and emphasise, the centrality of interrelationship. Possible tensions within contrasts are acknowledged, but the necessity of antagonism or contradiction is rejected. This move beyond binary logic attempts to locate and explore 'the excluded middle' (Shepherd, 1993, p.130) which opens discursive spaces for an articulation of what is left out or unaccounted for.

In questioning the implicit value and domination of the binary structure, feminists will attempt to occupy the impossible, paradoxical position of the middle ground, the ground left uncovered by the oppositional structure, being both subject and object, self and other, reason and passion, mind and body, rather than one or the other.

(Grosz, 1988, p.101)

In this middle ground, this new territory or space, many questions, dilemmas or conceptions collapse and cease to have meaning beyond the

binary system in which they are framed. In this new space, new questions, answers and solutions may be created alongside new realities.

So this chapter will have to struggle with long-established and comforting habits of thinking in opposites ... The introduction of "something else" disturbs minds that mistake comfortable thinking with clarity of thought.
(Hilman, 1996, p.129)

I argue that this something else, this middle ground, this excluded territory, this space of freedom, is simultaneously conceptual and corporeal; simultaneously symbolic, imaginary and real. In attempting to locate, move into, inhabit and map this territory I recognise the creative, intellectual, theoretical and practical dimensions and challenges of such a project. I argue that social subjects, as agents capable of self-reflexive, motivated, transformative action, can make a difference to the lived experience of a community of relational subjects. I situate such transformative action as self-aware, intentional activity and locate it within the discursive arena of a politicised consciousness. I recognise that both this text, as an account of possibilities for transformation, and its arguments and meanings are discursively produced within the territory made available to me by poststructuralist feminist theory.

Theory and possibility

Poststructuralist feminist theory emphasises contradiction, indeterminacy and multiplicity. In this view the self/other dualism, like the mind/body, subject/object and same/different dualisms, cease to be meaningful. Static concepts and categories give way to fluidity and changeability and contextualised, dialectical relationships replace absolute, hierarchical relationships.

Patriarchalist possessive individualism and its dualistic mode of ordering/mastering reality must go. Instead ... we have to conceive an individuality which locates its freedom in processes and relations which integrate all these dichotomous terms.

(Yeatman, 1993, p.290)

This process of integration, or in/ter/vention, is here understood as a 'politics of possibility' (Connell, 1995, p.233) which recognises the subject as an embodied, conscious, wilful agent in this process of personal/social

transformation. As proposed by Connell this politics of possibility requires 're-embodiment, a search for different ways of using, feeling and showing bodies' (Connell, 1995, p.233).

Given the possibilities of recombination, much of a degendered and regendered world will be familiar. But we should not underestimate the difference between the configuration of that world and our own ... what we are moving towards is indeed 'something rich & strange'; and therefore, necessarily, a source of fear as well as of desire.

(Connell, 1995, p.234)

The re-embodiment to which Connell refers, this search for different ways of using, feeling and showing bodies, I take to be possible within discourses and practices which reconfigure the meanings associated with embodied subject positions. These reconfigured meanings I take to be made possible in the territory created by the dialectical relationship between discourse and practice, and between mind and body, or more specifically between consciousness and body, where consciousness and body are no longer separated and opposed to each other. Thus I am attempting to reconfigure subjectivity in terms of embodied consciousness, and propose a view of subjectivity which foregrounds the materiality of the subject, where all capacity for thought, feeling and action is located in the spatial frame of the body. This desire to include the body, to incorporate the corporeal, is motivated and informed by the experience of my own body as a knowing body, as a source of knowledge previously lost to consciousness. It was through my body that my familiar was disrupted, that my sexual abuse was both experienced, re-experienced and re/presented to consciousness.

Consciousness

In my discussion of consciousness I seek to avoid a binary construct that opposes that which is understood to be conscious with that which is understood to be unconscious. I recognise that within different discourses, especially psychoanalysis and psychology, these terms have quite specific meanings and recognise also that the terms are differently privileged within different discourses. My purpose in foregrounding consciousness is quite particular, and though I attempt to locate the terms of discussion I do not wish to close it to the possibility of ambiguity, partiality and speculation. I take consciousness to refer to the relationship between the subject and their sense

of self/other/world as expressed in terms of self-awareness, critical reflection, self-reflexivity and intentionality. This understanding is axiomatic to my positioning of subjectivity and the subject in terms of 'self-conscious agency' (Rose, 1995, p.334) where transformative practice is understood as 'resistance to regulatory regimes and a performative statement of self-conscious othering' (Bell & Valentine, 1995, p.1490).

Whereas the subject of humanist discourses is ascribed a unique essence which is both fixed and coherent, poststructuralist feminist theory proposes a subjectivity which is 'precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we speak' (Weedon, 1991, p.33). Such a view frees discourses of both subjectivity and consciousness from belief in a fixed nature or essence and a true monolithic, monodimensional reality, and opens them instead to the possibility of critique, deconstruction and change. Such a view also shifts the emphasis from natural and absolute causes to the social realm of ideology, discourse and language.

Giroux (1984) identifies three aspects of the relationship between ideology, discourse and the lived experience of the subject: the sphere of the unconscious; the realm of common sense; and the sphere of critical consciousness. Giroux (1984) emphasises that historical and social forces are implicated in each of these aspects, and argues that when subjectivity is acknowledged as having been historically and socially constructed, critique of the hegemony of the dominant society is made possible. This critique occurs through analysis and contestation of everyday, commonsense, taken for granted practices which are historically and socially constructed. Such critique is made possible through the sphere of critical consciousness which exposes the historical and social forces which shape the construction of knowledge, social relations and material practices. Such critique is thus critical to the process of both personal and social transformation.

Consciousness and social context

Here I am foregrounding the extent to which individual subjects and social practices and structures are mutually informing. The individual subject is understood to be constituted through socially produced discursive practices. These practices produce a highly specified and limited set of

subject positions within which a particularised body/consciousness is inscribed. Thus

in the sense that the interpretations that make up my consciousness are drawn from a public realm of the interpretive possibilities in my culture, the self that I am is not even 'my' self. Although my interpretations may be my own, they are constrained by the possibilities that my culture makes available to me.

(Lorraine, 1990, p.16)

Ornstein (1986) recognises that these discursive practices and interpretive possibilities form the boundaries of what it is possible for us to understand. We tend, he says, 'to set mental limits on the possible boundaries of our world and work within these limits' (Ornstein, 1986, p.99). The processes and activities of consciousness and consciousness-raising are therefore involved when something needs deliberate, rather than automatic control or intervention. Personal and social transformation thus require alterations to the concepts and consciousness that form the boundaries of reality and the construction of subjectivity within culture.

Capra (1992) recognises that self awareness and reflective consciousness are social phenomena that arise through language and operate in a social system and thus 'cannot be understood by disciplines such as physics, chemistry, psychology or biology unless contextualised in the social domain' (Capra, 1992, p.127).

When we become conscious of the meaning of a word and understand it, our understanding of the word, our subjective sense of it, is of the relations that constitute its meaning ... Changes in subjectivity, changes in the frame of reference, alter meanings and knowledge in general.

(Rosenfield, 1993, pp.99-100)

In recognising the role of the self/subject in the construction of meaning, meaning and understanding are understood to be self-referential; they emerge from self-reference and are structured in terms of it. If, as Rosenfield asserts, all mental acts and all language are self-referential, then the means by which self-reference is created may, when altered, 'alter our knowledge of our bodies and objects in our environment as well as our use of language' (Rosenfield, 1993, p.103). Given the plasticity of the relationship between observer and observed, subject and object, the corporeal and the incorporeal proposed in chapter three, then changes in consciousness may be manifest as changes in reality. The political activities of the women's liberation and gay liberation movements have not only raised consciousness

about sex, gender and sexuality in terms of a range of juridical, medical, social, political and economic issues, but have resulted in changes to laws, institutions, practices and structures. Thus changes in consciousness have had material consequences which have impacted on the lived experience of social subjects.

Critical reflection and consciousness-raising

By becoming more self-conscious about our strategic choices - about when to deny, celebrate, or dislodge difference - we may come closer to minimising the inequalities it has traditionally entailed.

(Rhode, 1990, p.7)

In becoming more self-conscious about our strategic choices we need to become more conscious of the contexts and structures that inform those choices and render some of them more obvious or acceptable than others.

Friere (1990) foregrounds the ways in which social forces shape subjectivity and the means by which these processes may be challenged and transformed. He contends that empowerment through consciensisation - critical reflection on the circumstances of lived experience together with action - is the means through which individual subjectivity and social institutions and practices may be contested and transformed. Thus for Friere, reflection leads to action, and conversely, when a situation calls for action, that action will only constitute an effective praxis if its consequences become the object of critical reflection (Friere, 1990, p.41).

Such a process demands ideological critique and analysis of everyday taken-for-granted commonsense practices which instead of being treated as given, must be viewed within the historical, political and social contexts and relations within which they are constructed (Giroux, 1984, p.322). Thus for Giroux, critical consciousness makes visible the historically and socially constructed values which operate in the construction of knowledge and social relations. New or different knowledge emerges only through intention and reinvention, and through 'restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry' (Friere, 1990, p.46).

For Friere (1990) only active inquiry, participation and reflection can result in transformative consciousness and such consciousness is motivated towards critical intervention in reality. Subjects are therefore encouraged to critically perceive, and reflect on, the ways they exist in the world in which

they find themselves. Through such reflection they come to see the world not as a static reality 'but as a reality in process, in transformation' (Friere, 1990, p.56). Within this conception of a mobile reality, consciousness and world are understood as simultaneous, and simultaneous reflection on self, world and reality is understood to increase the scope of perception and allow for the observation of 'previously inconspicuous phenomena' (Friere, 1990, p.55). Thus, that which had been invisible is made visible. Critical perception and reflection is thus embodied in action directed at negating and overcoming given limits or boundaries.

Friere (1990) asserts that it is as transforming and creative subjects that we produce, in our ongoing relations with reality, both material goods and social institutions, both ideas and concepts. These institutions, ideas and concepts constitute historical epochs and these epochs are characterised by a complex set of ideas, concepts, hopes, beliefs, values, and desires which in turn shape both our reality and our consciousness. In proposing a dialectical relationship between consciousness and reality Ornstein and Ehrlich (1991), argue that thoughts and perceptions, and by implication ideas, beliefs, assumptions, realities, desires and knowledges, can be consciously changed or transformed.

Critical consciousness, as proposed by Friere (1990) and Giroux (1984), recognises the possibilities for active participation in the transformation of reality. Kenway & Modra (1992) suggest that if consciencisation is a process of critical reflection and action, then reflection without action 'is simply wishful thinking' (Kenway & Modra, 1992, p.156). They understand feminist theory as 'a discourse of hope and possibility that makes our dreams practical and possible' (Kenway & Modra, 1992, p.138) and argue that critical consciousness facilitates analysis of the context of problem situations, especially relations of power. Such analysis aims to enable 'people together to transform their reality, rather than merely understand it or adapt to it with less discomfort' (Kenway & Modra, 1992, p.156). Conscious awareness of a need for change also necessitates a change in the ways we construct reality, knowledge, truth and subjectivity. This in turn results in a change in consciousness.

For Seidler (1989) consciousness-raising is concerned with theorising, reflecting and acting upon an understanding of the relationship between consciousness, experience and power. Raising consciousness involves 'heightening one's awareness, becoming attuned to those things which previously were unremarked or ignored' (Eisenstein, 1990, p.35). This

process involves becoming aware of new insights, knowledges, meanings and possibilities, as well as the idea of raising into consciousness that which was formerly invisible or known and understood only at the unconsciousness level. This transformation of consciousness may result in a redefinition of subjectivity on the basis of these new insights, which in turn support the construction of new knowledges and realities.

Embodied consciousness

The human subject is an embodied agent, acting and judging in a context that can never be wholly objectified, with orientations and motivations that can never be fully grasped or controlled. The knowing subject is never disengaged from the body or from the world, which form the background and condition of every cognitive act.

(Tarnas, 1991, p.396)

Conscious awareness is always from a particular point of view and this point of view is only possible 'when the brain creates a body image, a self, a frame of reference' (Rosenfield, 1993, p.8). The complexity and diversity of each subjective world is thus 'a consequence of the dynamic qualities of the person's body image, which the brain uses as a frame of reference' (Rosenfield, 1993, p.49). In this way the body image becomes conscious by reference to itself; it is its own frame of reference. Rosenfield contends that any act of re/cognition requires a frame of reference, and that the only constant image to which the brain has ready access, is that of the body. Given this dialectical relationship between body and mind, Rosenfield foregrounds the importance of 'our conscious and unconscious attempts to maintain and create the body image' (Rosenfield, 1993, p.50). The body, as currently constituted in culture, is a sexed, gendered, sexualised body and constructed in terms of the binary oppositions male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual. If these sexed, gendered and sexualised bodies are the self-reference of consciousness, then I argue that consciousness too is sexed, gendered and sexualised. It is this gendered consciousness that informs our sense, and our stories, of who we are, what we know, what is real, what is true and what is possible. My gendered consciousness informs both the limits and possibilities of the subject positions I take up. My sense that I am male implies one set of choices, whereas my sense that I am not masculine informs another. I do not need to constantly refer to external markers and signals to achieve this. I have successfully internalised that which I have seen and

learned to be possible within my culture and embedded these positions in both my consciousness and my body. Each informs the other; my consciousness is structured with reference to, and in the spatial frame of, my body and my body is understood and inhabited with reference to my consciousness of what this body might be, or mean, or be capable of doing.

What I am arguing here is that subjectivity, knowledge, reality and consciousness are embodied; located in the body of the subject. This body is self-referential and relational. Where socially constructed categories form the fictive boundaries of the real, then the bodies constructed by/within those categories will reflect, describe and determine the boundaries of those categories, the boundaries of knowledge, the boundaries of reality and the boundaries of consciousness. Disrupted or redrawn boundaries admit possibilities and create spaces for new bodies, new knowledges, new realities and new consciousness.

Consciousness and gender

Millett (1971) locates personal and social transformation in the arena of sexual politics and understands that

the arena of sexual revolution is within human consciousness even more pre-eminently than it is within human institutions. So deeply embedded is patriarchy that the character structure it creates in both sexes is perhaps even more a habit of mind and a way of life than a political system.

(Millett, 1971, p.3)

Connell (1991) suggests that there are likely to be historical moments where the possibilities for a general change in consciousness and culture depend 'more critically on the dynamic of gender relations than on any other social force' (Connell, 1991, p.253) and argues that we are presently located in such a moment. Yet the present moment is not understood to be simply an inevitable culmination of events, but is rather understood as a point of choice. For Connell, the purpose of analysis is to better understand 'the structure of the choice and the collective projects that are feasible responses to it' (Connell, 1991, p.279).

Taylor (1989) argues that any attempts to transform gender relations need to focus on both socio-political structures and consciousness, for 'both are equally important in change' (Taylor, 1989, p.448). Rinehart (1992), in

theorising the relationship between gender and consciousness, understands that

Gender consciousness is the recognition that one's relation to the ... world is shaped in important ways by the physical fact of one's sex and by the associated characteristics of being defined either female or male.

(Rinehart, 1992, p.14)

Rinehart (1992) describes gender consciousness as a cognitive structure which enables critical reflection on gender identification and role ideology. She recognises that social practices, structures and situations reinforce one another in a perpetual interactive cycle and proposes that gender consciousness offers an opportunity to break this habitual cycle (Rinehart, 1992, p.116).

For Rinehart, gender consciousness is critical to personal, social and political change. Gender consciousness provides 'internal psychological resources and external spurs to action' (Rinehart, 1992, p.132). This process involves internal recognition, identification and engagement with sympathetic others, and mobilisation: the motivation to act. This process, suggests Rinehart, is 'a powerful antidote to gendered political socialisation and structural constraints' (Rinehart, 1992, p.132) which constantly interact with each other. Given the understanding that consciousness represents 'the living intellectual and affective framework used in order to make sense of the world' (Rinehart 1992, p.167) then consciousness knits thought and action. In a social context of subjects-in-relation group, consciousness arises from the recognition of one's membership of a group, identification with it, and action in, and on, its behalf (Rinehart, 1992).

Drawing on the theories of Connell (1995), Davies (1989, Giroux (1984), Lather (1991, Pile & Thrift (1995) and Rinehart (1992) I argue that if we retell, reinvent, reconceptualise and reinscribe our embodied subjectivities and realities, then it is possible to act to alter the structures, boundaries and forms of both our experience of being embodied and our experience within the social body. I argue, too, that critical to such transformation is a transformation of consciousness. I have attempted, in the autobiographical stories, to reveal my struggle with these ideas, these possibilities. In reflecting on the ways in which my sexuality has been discursively produced I have tried to liberate myself from the pejorative meanings and associations I have taken up as real. This has empowered me to think and feel differently about myself, to take up alternative subject positions, especially in relation to

men, and map a new view of the social/political terrain in which I reside and into which I am venturing.

Consciousness and transformation

All the evidence suggests that a tradition is made, not given: it is created retrospectively for self-validating purposes out of the present needs of a particular group of people, and is not handed down to everybody indiscriminately as a natural inheritance.

(Ruthven, 1990, p.128)

Critical awareness, and critical reflection embodied in personal, political and social action are essential to the process of conscious transformation. Further, conscious transformation is contingent on a transformation of consciousness. For Ornstein and Ehrlich (1991) the goal of such transformation is a change in mental contents and structures. This implies a need for critical reflection focussed on change, transformation, emancipation and liberation from those limitations imposed on perception, cognition and action that impede the recognition of multiple possible subjectivities, truths, knowledges and realities. Thus an alteration or shift in consciousness is fundamental to any change in prevailing cultural values, beliefs, systems and practices.

I have argued earlier in this chapter that the tradition that determines and limits thought, value, imagination, knowledge, language, subjectivity, truth and reality in patriarchal culture is one of hierarchical binary oppositions.

I have also argued that personal and social transformation will be possible only once we are freed from the impoverished, limiting construction of subjectivity in terms of dualistic polar opposites. Segal (1990) acknowledges that though we may continue to live our lives as women and men, with distinctive sexual/reproductive capacities and differences, these differences do not need to result in the sexual contrasts that have come to shape our commonsense, consensual reality. 'Social reality, group awareness or collective consciousness can be changed by new ideas only when they are brought into consciousness' (Starhawk, 1990, p.316). What is required then, for both personal and social transformation is an awareness, or consciousness, of the constructed nature of sex/gender/sexuality and sexual differences and the difference that these differences make.

For Hooks (1990) a politics of transformation involves 'working to identify both individually and collectively the specific character of our social identity' (Hooks, 1990, p.189). Advocacy of a transformative critical consciousness assumes a politicisation of the self that focuses on creating an understanding of the ways in which discursive categories such as sex, gender and sexuality determine both individual and collective experiences. Engagement in ongoing critical self-examination and reflection, coupled with engagement in collective discussion, is critical to the project of personal and social transformation, for

without committed vigorous dialectical engagement we cannot hope to change the world. Coming to critical consciousness requires that we give up set ways of thinking and being, shift our paradigms and open ourselves to the unknown and unfamiliar. If we do not change our consciousness we cannot change our actions or demand change from others.

(Hooks, 1990, p.190)

If we invent ourselves by virtue of the choices that we make, then we can reinvent/reconstruct ourselves by choosing differently: imagining different possibilities which translate into different realities. Giroux (1983) recognises the role of imagination in the formulation of a vision of a possible future, of a transformed society. He foregrounds the importance of human agency and struggle in 'revealing the gap between the society as it presently exists and society as it might be' (Giroux, 1983, p.30). Thus the conscious exercise of imagination, choice and action translates possibility into actuality. The possibilities for new and different inscriptions open possibilities for new and different subject positions, consciousness, bodies and realities. This is a politics of possibility.

Possibility

Men and women are caught up in a web of age old cultural determinations that are almost unanalysable in their complexity. One can no more speak of 'woman' than of 'man' without being trapped in an ideological theatre, where the proliferation of representations, images, reflections, myths, identifications, transform, deform, constantly, change everyone's imaginary and invalidate in advance any conceptualisation.

(Cixous & Clement, 1986, p.83)

Like Pile & Thrift (1995) I am arguing for a politics of transformation which is grounded on an ethics of difference which 'can express and

encourage an openness of outlook based upon a freedom to move across the border and the boundaries in pursuit of new senses of self and other' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.21). This crossing of boundaries is understood in terms of a struggle to traverse the difference between the familiar and the strange, where new meanings may be produced alongside 'liberated spaces that can be occupied' (de Certeau, 1984, p.105).

Yet, like Moore (1994) I recognise that 'we can't just think our way out of our present dilemmas, because thinking itself is part of the problem' (Moore, 1994, p.xiii). What is required are new discursive possibilities which provide alternatives to dualistic ways of thinking and being. Thus our thinking and being need to be radically reimagined. 'A new idea, a new language, and new traditions must be developed on which to base our theory and practice' (Moore, 1994, p.xv).

Poststructuralist feminist theory opens spaces within discourse for in/ter/vention. For Giroux (1991) this language of possibility needs to 'be capable of thinking risky thoughts', engage in 'a project of hope' and 'point to the horizon of the not yet' (Giroux, 1991, p.52). This language of possibility articulates opportunities for the construction of knowledges in which multiple narratives and social practices are constructed around a politics of difference. This politics opens subjects to the possibility of reading the world differently, resisting the abuse of power and privilege, and constructing alternative relationships and communities (Giroux, 1991, p.49).

Gramsci (1971) recognises that hegemonised subjects have the potential to contest their ideological positioning. Although hegemonic control is powerful and complex it is not in Gramsci's view, seamless. Thus a politics of possibility can locate and explore 'small and potentially powerful spaces' (Luke, 1992, p.27) within institutions and practices of social and ideological control. It is within these spaces that counter hegemonic discourses and practices can be organised.

Transforming patriarchal discourses of sex/gender/sexuality and expanding the range of possible subject positions necessitates unmasking, contesting and replacing the dualisms at the heart of all conceptualisations of, and discourse about, identity and reality; male/female, same/different, biology/culture, agency/determinism among them. Yet I recognise that our subjectivities are organised in terms of, and held in place by social structures that are informed by these dualisms. I recognise too that any challenge is inevitably complex, difficult, confusing, painful, threatening and always a site of contest. Yet, I argue that transformation of the performative structures and

practices through which subject positions are constructed and taken up, is possible.

Like Heckman (1992) I understand that this involves the invention of 'a new structure of multiple truths, multiple voices of sexuality which aim to undo, and open-up the closure of logocentric oppositions' (Heckman, 1992, p.165). What would be lost in this undoing and restructuring is

the necessary connection of the elements of gender relations to institutionalised inequality on one side and biological difference on the other. The depth of this change should not be underestimated. It would be a fundamental departure from a key condition of our present culture, which might be summarised as the sense that gender is fatality.

(Connell, 1991, p.290)

Possible subjects

We are in the midst of a period of social change in which gender issues have been profoundly politicised around the world - or perhaps a better word here would be contested - and we are plunged into an arena in which we ourselves, our identities our self-definitions, are part of the struggle.

(Eisenstein, 1991, p.101)

This struggle engages me in the project of speculating about the possibilities for a radical transformation of behaviour, bodies, thoughts, consciousness, relationships and politics beyond the boundaries of the familiar. Such a project aims to contest and transform the processes and practices through which meaning, myth and representation are socially produced and reproduced. It also proposes a liberation of the subject aimed at transforming each subject's relationship to their body, where they are enabled to become subjects who are mobile, complex and open and for whom political transformations of social institutions and structures are possible. Thus male/female, masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual subject positions as currently understood, would cease to exist.

For Heckman (1992) the aim is not to erase difference but reinscribe it in non-oppositional terms and in so doing dislodge the polarity by revealing a multiplicity of differences. Such re-inscription requires a 'non-polarised way of thinking about sexuality that rests on multiplicity rather than opposition' (Heckman, 1992, p.172). Thus masculine and feminine, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual cease to be understood as opposites and are instead, understood as elements that 'represent multiple differences, pluralities

of characteristics that cross and recross the alleged boundary between the two' (Heckman, 1992, p.174).

What I am arguing for here is a contextual, relational politics of possibility which simultaneously works on the personal and social body in the production of multiple possibilities for inscription. Davies suggests that the freedom to position ourselves in multiple ways, some of which bear no relation to current discursive practices, will require 'access to imaginary worlds in which new metaphors, new forms of social relations, and new patterns of power and desire are explored' (Davies, 1989, p.141).

I recognise that in a world based on dualistic hierarchical oppositions, where power and privilege accrue unequally according to ones relation to the ascendant binary, the illusion of freedom is made necessary by the lived experience of inequity, powerlessness and restriction. I recognise the freedom to which Davies refers to be contingent on counter-hegemonic political/social action and that this action is contingent on the disruption of 'the pervasive and powerful assumptions ... that certain past 'givens' are inevitable, unchangeable, natural' (Morgan, 1994, p.36).

For Davies this disruption begins with the recognition of multiple possible subject positions which 'bear little or no relation to the genitals of the people who take them up' (1989, p.110).

Eventually we may come to see these terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' as archaic and wonder how the social world could ever have been reduced to two types of people, these types being related to relatively minor pieces of anatomy whose sole relevance lies in biological reproduction. In such a Utopia those masculine and feminine qualities that are worthy of celebration would still be able to be celebrated, but without the destructive marginalisation of the feminine and without the restrictions currently placed on people to be exclusively or primarily one or the other.
(Davies, 1989, p.141)

Transforming subject relations

It is in the terrain of the relationship between the binary pair, the couple, that I locate both the current limits to, and the possibilities for, transformation. I argue that dualistic, hierarchical, oppositional discourses create dualistic, hierarchical, oppositional social subjects. Everyone and everything conceptualised within patriarchal culture is derived from, and reduced to, the male/female couple. This couple embodies patriarchal ideologies and discourses and is located in relations of power and privilege

where one half of the couple attains hegemony over the other. Discourses about the couple, especially those located in biology, normalise and legitimise these relations of power and come to be solidified in other discourses, such as law, religion, economics, labour and so on. Ideologies, social structures, discourses and discursive practices are taken up and performed by embodied social subjects. What I am struggling to articulate are possibilities for conscious re-embodiment of transformed subjectivities, subjects and subject positions. I am locating this struggle in the project of deconstructing and transforming the couple. Thus, the couple, as terrain, must be remapped.

To be aware of the couple, that is the couple that makes it all work, is also to point to the fact that it is on the couple that we have to work if we are to deconstruct and transform culture. The couple as terrain, as space demanding, insisting on, a complete transformation of one to the other. And so work still has to be done on the couple on the question.... of what a completely different couple might be like.

(Cixous 1981, p.44)

Hollway (1992) argues that in analysing the production of sex/gender and sexual relations, the interpersonal dynamic must be theorised (Hollway, 1992, p.265). This dynamic includes sex, intimacy, attraction, desire and emotion. Hollway recognises that 'because traditional discourses concerning sexuality are gender differentiated, taking up subject or object positions is not equally available to men and women' (Hollway, 1992, p.248). Therefore men and women are positioned differently, and unequally, in relation to the interpersonal dynamic and are differently inscribed in different discourse of sex, intimacy, desire, attraction and love. Hollway, in identifying discourses about intimate relationships to be gendered, recognises that they are characterised by dichotomised distinctions between the physical and the emotional, between sex and love.

For Taylor (1989) romantic ideology operates as a regulatory mechanism which is shaped by social and economic forces. As an ideal, it acts as a force in the regulation of behaviour between the sexes, working to construct male and female subjectivity in particular ways, especially within traditional versions of heterosexual coupling and marriage.

In reflecting on intimate relationships between women and men, Firestone foregrounds the phenomenon of love as 'the pivot of women's oppression' (1970, p.126). She argues that the concept of love is an ideological disguise which renders invisible the relations of power that prevail in heterosexual relationships. Millett (1970) theorises that sexual

relationships between women and men embody a political dimension and that this dimension involves, among other things, the unequal allocation of power. Among these beliefs is 'the most cherished of ideas, namely that of physical and emotional love between men and women' (Eisenstein, 1990, p.14). In this analysis, sex/love is revealed as a crucial part of the ideological structure that perpetuates 'male power over women, with their full participation' (Eisenstein, 1990, p.14). Love and sex, are thus critical to the continued reproduction of an ideology that reinforces a separation between male and female subject positions and then creates a set of beliefs about those positions.

In avoiding essentialist conceptions and definitions of sex, gender and sexuality, Cixous (1986) stresses that we must avoid assuming a natural anatomical determination in terms of opposites, and acknowledges that it is impossible, at this point in time, to predict what will become of sexual difference in the future. What is possible, however, is the apprehension of some discernible outlines of the future of difference, outlines that enable us to imagine a change in the oppositional structures that currently circumscribe the current discussions of sex/gender, man/woman, male/female, masculine/feminine. This leads to a different way of inscribing difference, where 'difference would be a bunch of new differences' (Cixous & Clement, 1986, p.81). Cixous' discourse of difference does not rest on oppositions, but rather, defines difference as plural and fluid.

In transforming the couple, Cixous disrupts the heterosexual binary pair with a proposed bisexuality. Cixous (1981) defines bisexuality not as the incorporation of two types of being, defined by phallocentric dualisms, but rather as the multiplication and inclusion of possibilities in oneself.

Bisexuality on an unconscious level is the possibility of extending into the other, of being in such a relation with the other that I move into the other without destroying the other: That I will look for the other where s/he is without trying to bring everything back to myself.

(Cixous 1981, p.55)

This bisexuality implies a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity between equal subjects. Reciprocity and mutuality imply relationships where authority and decision making are shared in ways that preclude domination (Flax, 1992, p.205). The outcome of mutual and reciprocal relations is not the legitimization of power 'but the enabling of empowerment' (Benhabib, 1990, p.109). The issue of empowerment is critical to my articulation of the

possibilities for transformation of both the subject and of social relations among subjects, a transformation that elides relations of domination.

For Gatens (1991) the struggle for a different social organisation requires relations of mutuality and reciprocity and not ones which exist between subject and object, self and other, or one and its complement. As described by Flax, (1992) relationships based on mutuality and reciprocity require subjects who need connection with others; who are able and willing to see how their own acts affect others; and who are 'able to tolerate the prospect of engaging in an open process without a guaranteed end result or privileged position within it' (Flax, 1991, p.207). Such subjects will also seek out, and be responsive to, differences and 'worry when discourse becomes too mono-vocal, stable or unitary' (Flax, 1991, p.207).

Flax (1992) suggests that in order to create and sustain these relationships there must be 'a self that desires reciprocity, which can also honour and do justice to our separateness, to the distinctiveness and integrity of each other person' (Flax, 1992, p.207). For Friere such a project aims for, and results in, 'the creation of a world in which it will be easier to love' (Friere, 1990, p.19), a world where relationships are characterised by 'mutual trust between the participants' (Friere, 1990, p.64).

In contemplating possibilities for mutual, reciprocal relationships, Berman (1990) questions the ideology of individualism that dominates patriarchal society. She suggests that such ideology situates subjects as 'separate, independent corpuscular bodies, each individually responsible only for our own fate' (Berman, 1990, p.246), and recognises that this perpetuates and justifies an elitist hegemony. Like Finzi

I do not believe ... that there is a natural law which will guarantee justice. I do think, however, that ethics must embrace a larger sphere than historically constituted by the polis and the citizen. A new gendered ethics must also concern private relationships ... The goal is to achieve an equilibrium of mutual recognition where difference does not imply hierarchy and where exchange does not imply the logic of domination.
(Finzi, 1992, p.142)

A discourse of love

Here I recognise the centrality of the discourse of love in gaining the complicity of desiring subjects in the maintenance of unequal power relations which gather to them the dichotomised elements of the male/female dualism.

This discourse of love is the ideological glue through which oppositions are joined in a parody of complementarity, unity and harmonious completion. Yet, having located the discourse of love at the centre of patriarchal relationships, I intend to leave it there. What I am arguing for is a reinscription of love in terms of mutuality and reciprocity, and for an understanding of such inscription as counter-hegemonic practice and as an alternative, and antidote, to patriarchal relations of power. Like Hollway (1992) I recognise that transformative practice does not automatically, or necessarily, eradicate what went before, either in structure or in the ways in which practices, powers and meanings have been historically/politically/socially produced. Consciousness-changing is not simply accomplished by replacing old discourses with new ones. Rather,

It is accomplished as a result of the contradictions in our positionings, desires and practices - and thus in our subjectivities - which result from the coexistence of the old and the new. Every relation and every practice to some extent articulates such contradictions and therefore is a site of potential change as much as it is a site of reproduction.

(Hollway, 1992, p.71)

Like Hooks I am arguing that in reconceptualising, reformulating and reimagining strategies for our future 'we need to concentrate on the politicisation of love' (1990, p.192). I do not conceptualise love within the context of a mythology of romance and intimate relationships but rather in the context of

a critical discussion where love can be understood as a powerful force that challenges and resists domination. As we work to be loving to create a culture that celebrates life, that makes love possible, we must move against dehumanisation, against domination. When women and men understand that working to eradicate patriarchal domination is a struggle rooted in the longing to make a world where everyone can live fully and freely, then we know our work to be a gesture of love.

(Hooks, 1990, p.192)

Convergence

I am attempting, in this chapter, to bring the themes of my text to some point of convergence. In the process of exploring possibilities for transformation I am foregrounding the centrality of relationship to the conceptualisation of the various subjects of this text. It is my desire to construct a relational context within which my discursive subjects, and

subjectivities, may be articulated, contested and transformed. Such transformation seeks out spaces of freedom in which social relationships are freed from the hegemony and tyranny of patriarchal relations of power, spaces in which subjects are empowered to transform their subject positions, their lived experiences, their everyday places and their social realities.

The central assumption underpinning this text is that change is both desirable and possible, and that this change necessitates the disruption of that which has become habitual and familiar. I recognise that this disruption might be painful and may be met with resistance, both personal and collective. I recognise too that those with power may find it hard to imagine being without it, and be reluctant to relinquish it, and that those with limited or little power may find it hard to imagine the terms of their own empowerment.

I locate my politics of possibility in the discursive arena of imagination, speculation, invention and action, and emphasise the need for a praxis created within the dialectical relationship between theory and practice. I place at the centre of this practice a politicised, conscious, self-reflexive social subject with agency and a will to transformative action. Such action is understood as being simultaneously personal and social, individual and collective, and motivated toward the realisation of communities that are not premised on relations of power. In so doing I am attempting to argue for more than a politics of possibility. I am arguing for a politics of love, where love is understood as the possibility of relationships characterised by the absence of power and expressed in terms of mutuality and reciprocity.

LACUNA: a closing statement

HER STORY

Islands are metaphors for the heart, no matter what poet says otherwise.

My own heart, like this wild place, has never been visited, and I do not know whether it could sustain life.

In an effort to find out I am searching for a dancer who may or may not exist, though I was never conscious of beginning this journey. Only in the course of it have I realised its true aim. When I left England I thought I was running away. Running away from uncertainty and confusion but most of all running away from myself. I thought I might become someone else in time, grafted on to something better and stronger. And then I saw that the running away was a running towards. An effort to catch up with my fleetfooted self, living another life in a different way.

Time has no meaning, space and place have no meaning, on this journey. All times can be inhabited, all places visited ... The journey is not linear, it is always back and forth, denying the calendar, the wrinkles and lines of the body. The self is not contained in any moment of any place, but it is only in the intersection of moment and place that the self might, for a moment, be seen vanishing through a door, which disappears at once ...

I don't know if other worlds exist in space or time. Perhaps this is the only one and the rest is rich imaginings. Either way it doesn't matter. We have to protect both possibilities. They seem to be interdependent.

Winterson, 1990, pp.80, 128

MY STORY

JANUARY 1994

I have been thinking, struggling, reading and writing for some considerable time now. I had considered this journey conceptually closed and nearing completion, yet feel the end to be unattainable, that I cannot complete it, that it cannot be completed.

I am aware that the journey is not linear, has no beginning, no end. Yet a text requires closure. Or does it? I struggle with the text because I seek openness and avoid closure. I'm frightened. What of me closes when the text closes? Do I lose something? Surrender the illusion of the me who wrote it? Does the text, on closing, become incomplete, partial, not at all what I want it to be? Not me?

How do I reconcile these things? Live with contradiction? Uncertainty? Confusion?

DECEMBER 1996

I'm still nervous, anxious, edgy. Any mention of Repressed Memory Syndrome and I'm nauseous. Confused. Did anything really happen? There is no final proof, and never can be. A private moment. A repressed re/constructed memory. A dead father. I am what is left. Me. But I'm not sure who I am or where it is that I am left. What I do know is that I am deeply suspicious of facts. Of truths. Of realities. Of knowledges. I take little for granted. I search for ambiguity, contradiction, possibility. I know that differences are made, and I want to make them. I have after all made this text, this story, this fabrication. This legacy of something that may never have happened.

MARCH 1994

I am a fiction constructed in my own image. This image is historically, politically and socially constructed through the equally fictitious discourses of others. This constructed fictitious self is the subject of my story. More precisely, these constructed fictitious *selves* are the *subjects* of my *stories*.

These stories are dreams, memories, ideas and experiences brought into language through the discourses of psychology, sociology, biology, psychiatry, physics, philosophy, pedagogy, metaphysics, theology, feminism, poststructuralism and a desperate need to know something yearning to be known.

These stories tell of journeys beyond dualistic conceptions of mind and body. My academic journey in thought has been paralleled by a journey in embodied consciousness. I have chartered the territory of a mis/remembered childhood, re/remembered it, and in so doing re/claimed and re/constructed it. I have transformed myself, my reality, in a paradigm where my experience is mediated more by my growing sense of personal power than by the power of those who have chosen, may still choose, to use their power against me. This is my act of self-preservation.

JUNE 1994

I have been on a journey and drawn a map, a rudimentary outline of the territory I have explored. You may recognise the territory and comfortably trace its outline. But then again this territory might be foreign, inaccessible. You may even find it badly drawn. So be it. This is after all my map and you are free to draw your own.

NOVEMBER 1996

journeying is, after all, so fundamental to the way we humans think about ourselves and assign our lives a meaning. Every second book you read is about some kind of journey, really, isn't it? And we constantly talk about paths in life - ways,

roads, progress, stages and so on - all travel metaphors when you think about it ...

The sentimental traveller travels simply in order to observe the motion of his own sensibilities. (People are awfully snooty about the word 'sensibilities' these days. Do you mean 'feelings'? they ask querulously. If so, say 'feelings'. But I think it's quite a useful word, I think it indicates, as the simple word 'feelings' doesn't, a self-awareness and even appreciation of what you feel, as well as a kind of pleasure, which may indeed be unwholesomely effete, in the way the different currents of feeling you experience work together to produce a whole - an emotional self, if you like . . .)

Dessaix, 1996: 241, 243

I want to tell you more about the journey that this sentimental traveller has taken, about the territory I have negotiated between the there and here, between the then and now, between the familiar and the strange. 'Behind this story lie the ghosts of other stories - and these relate to power' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.13).

DECEMBER 1996

My sharpest memory is of a single instant surrounded by dark. I was seven ... It took three decades for that instant to unfreeze ... It took a long time for me to ... drive that memory from that single place in time out toward the rest of my life ... it took so long for me to paste together what happened ... It went long unformed for me ... When the truth would be unbearable the mind often just blanks it out. But some ghost of an event may stay in your head. Then, like the smudge of a bad word quickly wiped off a school blackboard, this ghost can call undue attention to itself by its very vagueness. You keep studying the dim shape of it, as if the original form will magically emerge. This blank spot in my past, then, spoke most loudly to me by being blank. It was a hole in my life that I feared and kept coming back to because I couldn't quite fill it in.

Karr, 1995:3, 5 & 9

This is not my story. I did not write it. It is not mine. Yet, paradoxically it is mine. My story. There was a dark instant. A frozen moment. I was seven. Three decades later that moment, that ghost of an event, unfroze and came haunting. So you see the story is mine and not mine after all; both and at the same time. Though details may differ, the narrativity, our always fictionalised lived experience, is constituted in much the same ways, through much the same discourses. Here the I and you dissolve into us, the we, the simultaneously same and different, self and other. Personal and collective. Individual and social. Paradox and contradiction.

DECEMBER 1996

In producing this text I have employed the worn, but not exhausted, metaphors of journey, map and territory. Yet the journey, map and territory of which I speak/write have not always been metaphoric. Having completed the first draft of this text in 1994 I spent the following year travelling overseas with my companion. All text annotated '1995' is taken from the journal I kept during that time. Those entries map the inner territory I traversed and are informed by, and intimately related to, the theoretical reflections prompted by the writing of this text. This text is also a map of the intellectual territory in which I have travelled.

This text then represents a coalescence of three journeys: the outward bound and geographical; the intellectual and theoretical; the inward bound and personal. The direction of these journeys has been signalled by a sense of possible, unknown, yet to be imagined destinations. The going has provoked anxiety, confusion, doubt, fear and pain. Along the way I have been variously lost and found, known paths have been disrupted and arrival at familiar or anticipated destinations deferred. Yet always I have been seduced to continue, not by the promise of arrival, but by my desire to move inexorably toward the possible.

JULY 1996

auto-ethnography ... the results of a writer's attempts to use reflexivity to interrogate the self/other relationship come perilously close to narcissism and solipsism. Every childhood

slip, every parental flaw ... becomes grist to a 'falsely radical' mill ... We end up with something like the confessional, romantic hero of yore that the writer has just spent blocks of print criticising, but now reconsecrated by the act of self-criticism.

Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.16

MAY 1995

I am a boulder. Held at the edge of a precipice by a rubber band. Stretched, taut, precarious. About to give way, stretch and catapult over the edge. I am awkward. Tense. Distracted. Gently nauseous. I want to lie down and never get up. I want to run away. Escape. Retreat. Like a monk. In a monastery. But I am not a monk. I am not in a monastery. I am here in this body. Flushed. One foot nailed. Spinning. Covering the same territory. Again. And again. And again. I've said all this before. And before that. What has changed? Nothing? Everything? A little? I'm so wearied by it all. The in-here journey has halted in an unknown and unrecognisable place whilst the out-there journey shambles along in a disinterested way. I feign interest. Perhaps in a moment, now and then, it is real. The interest that is, not necessarily the moment. This obfuscation, this confusion, is numbing and exhausting. The weariness again. To claim me. Body and mind.

JUNE 1995

Where do I begin and end? At what point do I freeze the field of possibility to say this is me? How do I recognise, and seize, a new moment in which to say, this is me also?

JULY 1995

I find myself at the edge of my limits, at the boundary, and see no place to go. The view beyond is blank, without sign. No path. No door. No light to guide me. All I can do is wait in this dark emptiness at the edge. Wait for the courage to step into the space beyond my imagination.

AUGUST 1995

I am here at the edge again. Still. I see no way beyond. No way to step. No stone, no path, no door, no gate. Blind, mute and lame from lack of courage and want of imagination. Perhaps this is my life. To stand constantly at the edge, squinting blankly at nothing, searching for a way, a place, to cross. But no. I will cross. I don't know where, or when, or even how. and once across I don't know what awaits me. I don't know what to expect. I am lost. My familiar is disrupted. I don't like it. I want the old comfortable baggy kneed life to fold back into.

SEPTEMBER 1995

I sit here at the water's edge looking out on the horizon. Shadows of distant lands lie beyond the shimmering water, small dark shapes suggest boats. Tonight I will sail on these waters, away from where I am and where I have been, toward a place I have not yet been but only imagined. I know that this place of my imagination may, or may not, correspond to any real place, or at least any place believed to be real. The I that sits and writes feels already adrift on the waters that lap against the rocks beneath. Adrift, my familiar is gone, willingly surrendered, eagerly abandoned. Yet still, a woolly nostalgia makes a soft place for memories not wholly forgotten. A moment between. Not gone. Not arrived. A moment of stillness at the edge of perpetual waving motion. A paradoxical moment of seeing but not knowing; knowing but not seeing. What is to become of me? I weep at this beautiful mystery that so confounds me, but in weeping am neither self piteous nor sorrowful. Rather I am moved to feel both my limits and my possibilities. I trust that beyond the limits of this body, this mind, this imagination, lies a realm of possibility more subtle than this clumsy instrument can yet discern.

OCTOBER 1995

I feel so in need of courage and imagination. I have been so content with small things, and artfully enlarged them to seem a little plumper, a little rounder, a little more substantial. But they were, are, beneath all this artifice, still small. Still tentative. Still safe. I want to be bolder, to stretch the space

around myself in different directions, to enlarge myself, my sense of who I am, of what I can do. But the habit of smallness is not easily disregarded, discarded. It has become a comfortable and faithful protective garment, and it is really hard now to unravel this self I've been so long knitting. What began as something warm and comfortable has become, imperceptibly, a straight-jacket whose chosen colours and soft fabrics mask its darker function of binding me to a way of life now passed. What is required then is a different fabric, texture and hue with which to clothe my newness. But I am no knitter. I cannot read a pattern nor wield any needles. Right now I have only a pen with which to craft a life. It is blue and I am writing. Words tumble from silent lips as I struggle to animate this awkward mouth, this swollen tongue, to say I am here. This is me.

NOVEMBER 1995

So the end is in sight, but where am I? Where I began? Not quite. But how far past? I am frightened. Frightened that I have wasted time or lost a moment of possibility. I don't want to go back to where I was. What I was. Who I was. But what and who and where was I anyway? To begin with? What will alert me to the degree to which I might have changed? Have changed? How will I know? What do I want? This troubles me. I am so often unclear as to what it is that makes this journey purposeful, bearable. Satisfying even. I have my suspicions though. I've come to realise, in these last few days, that what I yearn for, what confounds me, is re-inscription. Repatterning. Possibility.

DECEMBER 1995

My unfurling hand releases the captive beauty of the butterfly. She flies now, freely, the incandescence of her wings blindingly lovely as she shimmers into possibility.

DECEMBER 1996

we imagine ourselves to be whole, to be complete, to have a full identity and certainly not to be open or fragmented; we imagine ourselves to be the author, rather than the object, of the narratives that constitute our lives. It is this imaginary closure that permits us to Act. Still, I would suggest, we are now beginning to learn to act in the subjunctive mode, as if we had a full identity, while recognising that such a fullness is a fiction, an inevitable failure. It is this recognition that permits us to acknowledge the limits of our selves and with it the possibility of dialoguing across the subsequent differences - the boundary, or horizon from which, as Heidegger points out, things unfold; both towards and away from us.

(Chambers, 1994, pp.25-26)

Self/text

In exploring the textual staging of knowledge through culturally produced, ideologically situated discourses I have positioned author and text as co-constructions, fabrications, fictions. Thus text and author are inseparable, one and the same, each a reading of the other.

In creating this self-reflexive text I have explored some of the discursive structures and practices through which the subjects of this text, including its author, have been fabricated. This exploration has been located in the historical/political/social context of patriarchy and patriarchal relations, especially relations of power.

This self/text has been spoken/written in the space created by the painful disruption of my familiar, an experience of betrayal by both the father and my own mind/body/memory. It has also been created through critical reflection on other, previously invisible, betrayals which serve to maintain patriarchal hegemony, power and hierarchical, dualistic, oppositional relationships between social subjects and various subjects of knowledge.

In critically reflecting on the terms of my own fabrication I have attempted to articulate possibilities for both personal and social transformation and am heartened by Connell's assertion that

Life histories give rich documentation of personal experience, ideology and subjectivity ... But life histories also, paradoxically, document social structures, social movements and institutions. That is to say, they give rich evidence about impersonal and collective processes as well as about subjectivity ... A life history is a project, a unification of practice through time. The project that is documented in a life-history is itself the relation between the social conditions that determine practice and the future social world that practice brings in to being. That is to say, life-history method always concerns the making of social life through time. It is literally history.

(Connell, 1995, p.89)

In the project of re/defining myself and my reality I also hope to articulate the possibilities for re/defining our collective selves and realities, our relationships and communities. Like Finzi (1992, p.142), I emphasise the desire to become, and not a specific model for that becoming. Like Birch (1993) I understand that any political, social or personal transformation is contingent upon a 'change of consciousness in the way we see our world and ourselves in relation to the world' (Birch, 1993, p.19).

My project is simultaneously personal, social, political and spiritual. It is political in that it advocates the need for 'collective activity designed to

improve outer world social, economic and environmental conditions' (Andrews, 1994, p.10). It is spiritual in that it is motivated by 'a desire to find meaning' (Andrews, 1994, p.176).

This self/text, motivated by a desire for change and a politics of possibility, anticipates a future in which the social distinctions currently drawn between women and men, female and male, feminine and masculine, homosexual and heterosexual are rejected and cease to be meaningful. This possible future is one in which both subjectivity and subject relations are informed by multiplicity, reciprocity and mutuality. In anticipation of this possible future this self/text seeks to critique, contest and locate alternatives to those patriarchal structures and practices which form the boundaries of current conceptions of subjectivity and subject relations.

In so doing I aim to contest, critique and disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions and meanings as well as commonsense, consensual realities and knowledges. Such action is motivated by a search for new definitions of, and possibilities for, subject positions and relations which challenge the received wisdom, symbols and metaphors which explain and justify that which has become familiar, true and real. Such challenge arises from 'a new consciousness, a consciousness that (makes) it possible to explore - and eventually to construct - new frameworks for analysing and interpreting and ultimately changing the social construction of gender' (Haste, 1993, p.129).

This exploration of self, of social relations, of self-in-relations, becomes possible when subjectivity is viewed as the product of 'a lifetime's relationship to a diverse spread of social practices and power relations within a variety of institutions' (Jackson, 1990, p.264). Thus socially constructed identities may be apprehended and understood through critical reflection on lived experiences and interrogation of the historical, political and social forces through which these subjectivities have been constructed. This requires a dialectical understanding of the relationship between ideology, discourse, social structures, practices and institutions and lived experience in terms of subjectivity and agency.

My reconstructed fictive narratives of lived experience provide the context for my reflections on theory and I have argued that these theories are themselves similarly fictive. Having positioned these reflections on academic theory as similarly fictitious, I now claim them to be similarly autobiographical; they are constructed in terms of my experience in order that I may construct and articulate my understanding of, and meanings about, that

experience. This proposed reflexivity between experience and theory recognises that

if autobiographies are to question rather than endorse dominant ideologies, then personal histories cannot be unanalytically confessional but they have to be integrated into a critical frame that excites and provokes an engaged questioning in the reader.

(Jackson, 1990, p.4)

The critical frame through which I have attempted to construct and articulate this self/text is informed by poststructuralist feminist theory. Thus informed, my self/text desires an articulation of its many subjects that suggests heterogeneity, complexity, plurality, fragmentation, discontinuity, contradiction, multiplicity and ambiguity. Yet, in contesting, disrupting and hoping to transform any of the discourses represented in this text I remain conscious that 'we're always inside the concepts we at the same time wish to critique' (Jackson, 1991, p.135).

Like Lather (1991) I recognise that 'efforts toward a world in which we can all flourish' (Lather, 1991, p.158) must be both within and without, within and against, the discourses and practices currently available, and that it is from this inside/out location that ex-centric, counter-hegemonic discourses and practices may be produced. I thus seek discourses that allow the subject to be thought of in terms of both interior and exterior, agency and structure, inside and out.

Outside and inside are both intimate - they are always ready to be reversed, to change their hostility. If there exists a borderline between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides.

(Bachelard, 1964, p.217-8)

Disruption, transgression and attempts to traverse this borderline, and the discursive boundaries of subjectivity, thus involve pain; a painful disruption of the familiar.

Disrupting the familiar

In wanting to disrupt the familiar I want also to avoid replacing it with yet another fossilised familiar with its own boundaries, tactics and strategies, structures and practices. I thus propose a succession of multiple, always

disrupted familiars. Like Pile and Thrift I understand that 'theories are not 'objects' but living territories of contemplation, constantly on the move' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.24).

A final strand is my desire to write my way to some understanding of the deeply unsettling discourses of postmodernism, in a way that doesn't totalise, that doesn't present emergent, multiply-sited, contradictory movements as fixed and monolithic. To write 'postmodern' is to simultaneously use and call into question a discourse, to both challenge and describe dominant meaning systems in ways that construct our own categories and frameworks as contingent, positional, partial.

(Lather, 1991, p.1)

As much as I have tried to avoid a final synthesis or reductionist totalising statements and positions, I have also attempted to avoid non-contextualised, a-historical, a-political and a-social statements and positions.

Still, I recognise the partiality of my text, its incompleteness, its gaps, omissions and failures. In attempting to make connections across a variety of discourses I have constructed a necessarily partial view of the subjects of my inquiry, an inquiry which represents my attempt to shift myself, and any willing reader, 'into ways of thinking that can take us beyond ourselves' (Lather, 1991, p.164).

Like Grosz (1989) and Lather (1991) I am attempting to exploit the contradiction and ambiguity to be found in a range of available discourses in order to create a space in which it is possible to think, feel and act differently. Yet, the question remains

What difference to the world does our theory make? A text that might help enable movement beyond received habits of thought and practice is a form of political intervention, even given the (largely unknowable) limits of discursive challenges.

(Lather, 1991, p.154)

Discursive challenge

I argue that discourses always limit thought and action and are in constant need of contestation, critique and in/ter/vention. Such a view recognises the power/knowledge nexus through which certain discourses attain hegemony over others.

Discursive challenge simultaneously recognises and contests the limits of available discourses and calls for in/ter/vention in creating discursive spaces beyond those limits.

I position this discursive challenge as a political activity and an act of creation; disrupting and transforming the familiar and making something other than what went before. Like Grosz (1989) I recognise that in undertaking creative, political action of this sort we must 'become familiar with the patriarchal discourses, knowledges and social practices which define and constrain them: these provide the only sources and tools against patriarchy' (Grosz, 1989, p.133). Thus discursive challenge is located simultaneously inside and outside, within and against, the discourses it seeks to contest.

Like Finzi (1992) I recognise that in contesting and transforming patriarchal structures and practices it is necessary to recognise and reconstruct 'the external and internal history which has made us what we are' (Finzi, 1992, p.141). In the course of this transformation other possibilities, other ways of being and relating, will become visible and available.

Poststructuralist feminist theory provides a context in which I am able to ask questions about what I had previously 'not thought to think, about what has been muted, repressed, unheard' (Lather, 1991, p.156) from both inside and outside myself, from that which is both within and against me. Like Walkerdine I recognise the need to 'create some other stories, which face the present and confront it' (1995, p.330). My emphasis on fiction, narrative and performance locates this self/text in a theoretical context which anticipates the possibilities for creative in/ter/vention, for the production of new narratives and performances.

My understanding of poststructuralist feminist theory recognises that it does not invent a new structure to replace the old, but rather, 'provides insights into the discursive mechanisms which hold existing structures in place' (Davies, 1993, p.198). These insights allow the formation of different relationships to the existing structures which, no longer understood as absolute, are instead understood to be open to change through both individual and collective action. Whilst the constitutive powers of these structures must be acknowledged, Davies suggests they can also be 'laughed out of existence, played with, disrupted, or used to manufacture new possibilities' (1993, p.198). These openings 'occur in language, individual psyches and in the material and symbolic structures in which we are all embedded' (Davies, 1993, p.200).

It is obvious then, that we need to imaginatively move beyond existing discursive, interactional and structural constraints and to construct new storylines and new ways of relating to our bodies, if we are to escape the

relentless imposition of binary definitions dividing male from female, heterosexual from homosexual, limiting ourselves and our sexuality.
(Davies, 1993, p.148)

I recognise that the exploration of subject positions beyond dualistic conceptions of subjectivities will require, and result in, 'beings who are complex, mobile, open' (Cixous, 1986, p.102). In accepting the other as a component of oneself, subjects are made 'much richer, more various, stronger and - to the extent that they are mobile - very fragile' (Cixous, 1986, p.102). It is only in this condition of fragility that we are able to invent and this invention is not possible 'without there being in the inventing subject an abundance of the others of variety ... whole populations issuing from the unconscious, and in each suddenly animated desert, the springing up of selves one didn't know' (Cixous, 1986, pp.202-3).

The role of invention and imagination is thus critical to the re/envisioning of a possible, future society. For Giroux (1983) this vision is located in 'the gap between the society as it presently exists and society as it might be' (Giroux, 1983, p.30). It is in this gap, this space of freedom, this elsewhere, that new meanings, knowledges, realities and subjectivities may be produced and performed.

Changes in behaviour go hand in hand with changes in consciousness: to become a feminist is to develop a radically altered consciousness of oneself, of others, and of what, for lack of a better term, I shall call 'social reality'.

(Bartky, 1990, p.12)

Self/knowledge/reality

The epistemology which results from this process of in/ter/vention emphasises, and is constructed upon, the continuous interaction between who we imagine ourselves to be and how we understand the world, between our constructed subjectivity and our constructed reality. This interactive epistemology emphasises the need for theory to be self reflexive, focussing not only on the outer world but also on ourselves and our relation to that world. Self reflexive theory building involves critical examination of our historical, political and social location, our actions, motives, values, desires, perceptions, thoughts and emotions. 'Our efforts to reinterpret and refine our emotions, thoughts and actions are necessary to our theoretical investigation'

(Jaggar, 1990, p.164). Thus our responses to, and actions in, the world change as we conceptualize it differently. Further, these changing responses and actions stimulate new insights, new connections, new knowledges, new subjectivities and new realities. Thus the reconstruction of ourselves is inseparable from the reconstruction of our knowledge and our social reality.

In order to develop an effective politics of everyday life we need to understand better than we do now not only the process of personality development, but the micropolitics of our most ordinary transactions, the ways in which we inscribe and reinscribe our subjection in the ordinary.

(Bartky, 1990, p.119)

What I am searching out then, in this self-reflexive constructed text, is a radically altered understanding of self, society and reality. I search too, for a radically altered sense of subjectivity, as the embodiment of an altered consciousness, understanding, knowledge and way of seeing. This is a political project of transformation, a politics of possibility in which previously axiomatic realities are interrogated, disrupted and transformed, where we come to understand 'what we are and where we are in the light of what we are not yet' (Bartky, 1990, p.15). Like Bartky I recognise that we come to understand who/what/where we are in the light of what we are in the process of becoming. In coming to see things differently we are able to imagine, invent and enact possibilities for empowering, liberating personal change and social action.

Transformative practice thus explores the limits of choice and constraint in the construction of subjectivity, knowledge and reality, and understands that these limits are determined by the regimes of power and truth that operate in a given historical/political/social moment. The validity and hegemony of those truths accorded authority in such moments is thus opened to question and disruption. The naturalness, rightness and obviousness of social arrangements, taken-for-granted knowledges and meanings and conceptions of reality are challenged so that social subjects may see both the constraints and the potential for change in their situations: 'The subject is not only a signified but can disrupt or transform the pre-given chain' (Flax, 1992, p.204).

This disruption begins with the problematisation of an apparent, naturalised reality, of taken for granted, commonsense knowledges and of habitual, repetitive performances that come to be accepted as evidence of a true, natural self. Poststructuralist feminist theory makes visible the ways in

which these realities, knowledges and subjectivities are 'created and sustained through text and talk so that we can begin the awesome task of finding other ways of speaking/writing ourselves into existence' (Davies, 1994, p.35).

In the production of this self/text I am attempting to explore and transcend the limits of an illusory rational unitary subject and imagine both myself and other social subjects to be populated by multiple selves. Through my self/text I am attempting to speak/write of possibilities for disrupting the familiar, for generating multiple positions and coming to know in multiple ways, so that the familiar oversimplified and impoverished division of all phenomena, including human subjects, in terms of oppositional dualisms ceases to be meaningful, ceases to constitute commonsense, and ceases to determine the limits of a socially constructed consensual reality. With the meaningful distinctions and differences between male and female disrupted, space is created for the construction of a vision of the possible, a vision beyond what is currently taken as the limit of the real. In so doing multiple realities disrupt the hegemony of the static hardened patriarchal reality which assumes its claim to singular and uncontested truth; that being the fundamental dichotomised distinction between man and woman, self and other, where the other can only exist as opposition.

The intention then, in creating a picture of an alternative society, is to 'actually change the current reality by means of creating a model, or pieces of model, of a society organised along different lines' (Eisenstein, 1990, p.xiii). Thus, what is at issue is the ways in which notions of sex, gender and sexuality are bounded by clusters of attributes assigned to women and men on the basis of genital sex. These clusters establish boundaries for both acceptable and unacceptable, normal and deviant behaviours, and their common sense, taken-for-granted, and fixed meanings render them natural, and hence invisible as discursive constructions.

The formulation of possibilities for an alternative society, and altered social relations, requires critical reflection on the ways in which 'we are all caught up in ideological processes in our everyday lives' (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.33). Critical reflection on the ways in which gender is constructed in the intersection between culture, social structure, power and subjectivity not only illuminates the process of that construction but the possibility of its transformation. Conscious, intentional action that is historically, politically and socially situated can lead to the transformation of seemingly rigid structures and practices.

As Davies (1993) makes clear any attempts to disrupt old cultural patterns and invent new ones must simultaneously deal with individual psyches, social structures and patterns, and the discursive practices through which they are constituted.

Poststructuralist feminist theory provides the discursive means through which we might recognise, articulate and transform the ways in which we are constituted in patterns of being and desire, and of relations between subjects. Since the subject is constructed within the context of social relations it is understood as a self-in-relations, and 'the search for a life lived well, where humans flourish, necessitates the search for new modes of relationship' (Porter, 1991, p.22).

I imagine these new modes of relationship to be characterised not by domination, oppression, suppression, denial or destruction of the other, but rather, by differentiation, identification, tolerance, acceptance and connection between subjects. Such relationships create a reality comprised of 'groups of relations that intersect, interact, and change in the process but are not in essential opposition' (Porter, 1991, p.22). Such a view envisions the possibility of mutual, reciprocal, non-exploitative human relationships. This concept of relational subjects, of self-in-relations, forms the basis of a 'narrative sense of self which confirms individuality and the social basis of our selfhood through the intermeshing of personal histories' (Porter, 1991, p.196).

I am attempting, in this self-reflexive text, to produce a narrative sense of myself, a self that is simultaneously symbolic, imaginary and real, a self discursively produced in the relationship between an embodied subject position and social structure. In so doing I am searching for spaces of freedom from within which I may 'speak in order to change things' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.285).

In constructing this self/text I am attempting to articulate a subject which is 'in some ways detachable, reversible and changeable; in other ways fixed, solid and dependable; located in, with and by power, knowledge and social relationships' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.12).

In so doing I am also seeking 'new paths, new performances and new politics' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.12). I am arguing for a politics of possibility actualised through a politics of love and understand these to be founded on 'an ethics of difference, which can express and encourage an openness of outlook based upon a freedom to move across border and boundaries in pursuit of new senses of self and other' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.21). I understand this move across borders and boundaries to involve traversing the difference between the

familiar and the strange, where this difference is understood in terms of 'a non- hierarchical, qualitative multiplicity, which can realise continuity without assimilation' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.20). I understand too that this is 'a determinedly partial activity ... an ethics of wanting to know, not knowing and not wanting to know ... a Necessary, Passionate fiction' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p.50).

Closure

I recognise here at the end of my text, as throughout it, that I am in danger of passing superficially over what I find to be difficult theoretical material. It is not my intention to debate the relative merits of competing discourses. Rather I am foraging among these various discourses and theories in search of insights into the ways in which I might have negotiated, and of how I might renegotiate, my sense of myself as occupying a particular set of subject positions.

I recognise that this project of personal, political and social change is made possible through the willing struggle to contest and transform the discursive practices through which subjectivity, knowledge and reality are constructed: 'Making something new is to imagine different grids on reality, other views on the world' (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.138).

The future must no longer be determined by the past. I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them, to confer upon them an irremovability the equivalent of destiny ... Anticipation is imperative.

(Grosz, 1994, p.xiii)

The reality that I seek, that I imagine and anticipate, is one that refuses, disrupts and traverses the boundaries between male and female, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual, mind and body, conscious and unconscious, fiction and reality. In assuming that I will, in my search, encounter other subjects, I also assume that together we may confront and negotiate our own/shared subjectivities and understand 'ourselves as the fictional subjects of our own histories, with all the intensity and passion that is entailed in being and becoming the specific subject that one is' (Davies, 1994, p.42).

There is 'destiny' no more than there is 'nature' or 'essence' as such. Rather, there are living structures that are caught and sometimes rigidly set within historico-cultural limits so mixed up with the scene of history that for a long time it has been impossible (and it is still very difficult) to think or ever imagine an 'elsewhere'.

(Cixous & Clement, 1986, p.83)

This self/text is my attempt to imagine, to begin to imagine, an elsewhere.

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